

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **NOD ALMIGHTY!**

PCZONE

ISSUE 169 JULY 2006

EXCLUSIVE!

COMMAND & CONQUER 3

**All-out attack on Earth –
C&C's Tiberium Wars!**

**MASSIVE reveal of the
hottest RTS of 2006!**

**"Sam Fisher is ordered to kill
a bound and gagged prisoner"**

Splinter Cell: Double Agent's dark side!

**THE FIRST NEWS
ON THE BIGGEST
GAMES OF E3**

UT2007 • BF2142 • F.E.A.R. expansion
TURN TO PAGE 18 NOW!

**EXCLUSIVE
REVIEWS!**

**GHOST RECON:
ADVANCED
WARFIGHTER**

War hero or surrender monkey?



**SIN EPISODES:
EMERGENCE**

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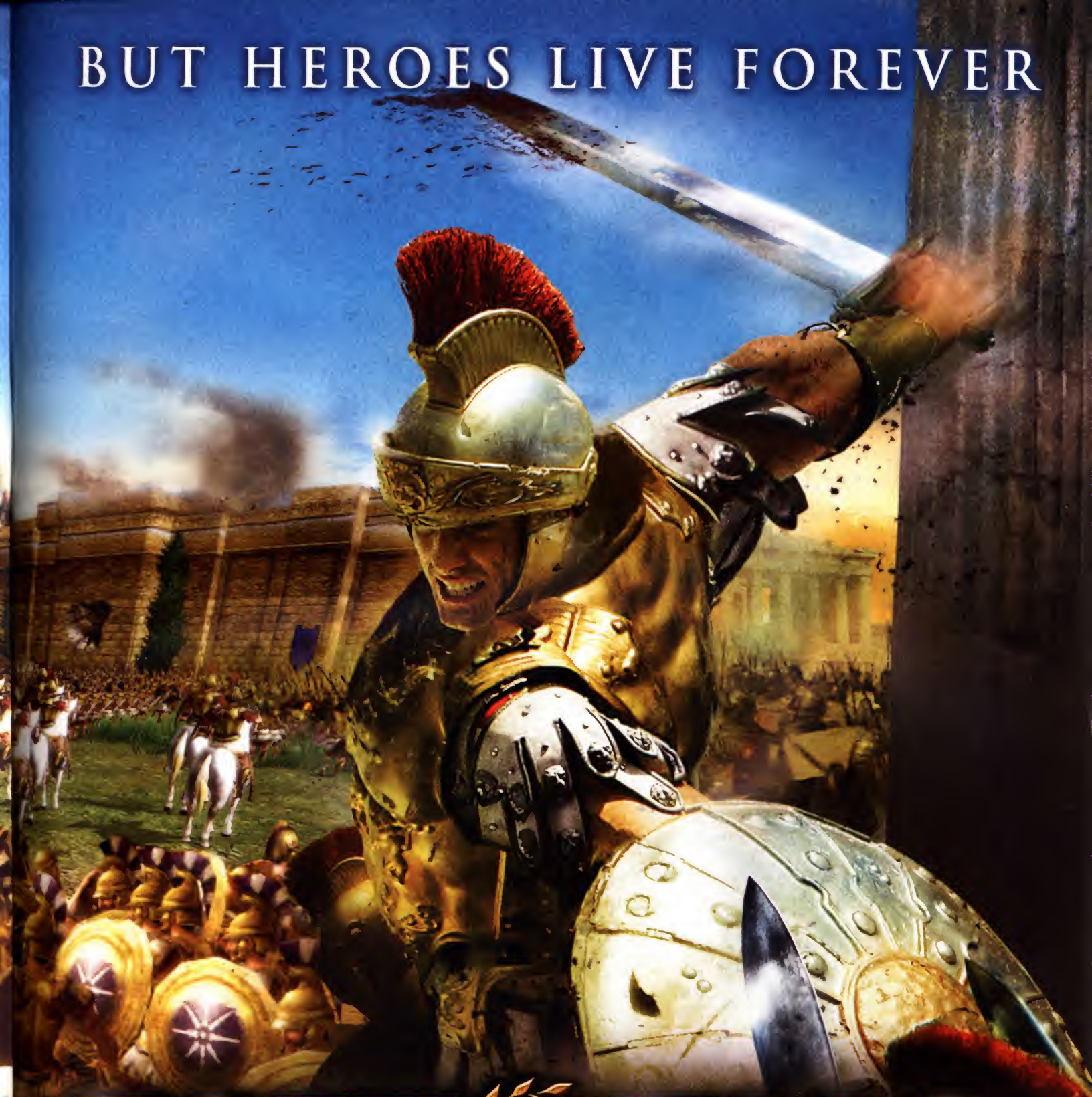


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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

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COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

The RTS of the century is reaped for the harvest...

DOMINIK DIAMOND 146

"Why are there no decent videogames about Jesus?"



PREY 32

HANDS-ON WITH THE SHOOTER
TURNING YOUR WORLD UPSIDE-DOWN!



SHOW MAN

BY THE TIME you've ingested this month's issue through your eyes, the yearly videogames love-in that is E3 will have just finished. As Britain's premier PC games rag, we booked it, packed it and f***ed off to sunny and shallow Los Angeles, USA, to ensure we grab the scoops on all the games you'll be playing this year and beyond.

We were there on the frontline at the LA Convention Center, squeezing in between the obese *Warcraft* T-shirt-wearing fanboys, pushing past the European weird-bearded games journalists, and pretending to ignore the countless toothy booth babes to bring you exclusives on Crytek's *Far Cry*-beater *Crysis*, the new *F.E.A.R.* expansion *Extraction Point*, class shooter *UT2007* and of course, our massive cover game *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars*.

In a particularly globe-trotting issue, I also got the rare opportunity to visit Ubisoft's development studio in Shanghai, China, for the exclusive on the new *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*. In the past I've found stealth games a little frustrating to say the least, so it was a real pleasure to witness a company reinventing an ageing franchise and hopefully opening up Sam Fisher's world of espionage to more players.

Oh yeah, and we also grabbed the definitive reviews of the surprisingly fantastic *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* (as well as a playable demo), gritty episodic shooter *SiN Episodes: Emergence*, and the sick-and-twisted-but-damn-funny *Hitman: Blood Money*. Britain's best PC games mag? No problem.

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 46 words...

Crysis, *Huxley*, Sefton talks *Splinter Cell*, then our mega-C&C bit. Men with visors in *GRAV*, ladies with red hair in *SiN*, men with no hair in *Hitman* and Wendy's nice hair in *Hardware*. Free things, brand new Retro Zone and a chat with the *Fable* guys!

Sound BLASTER

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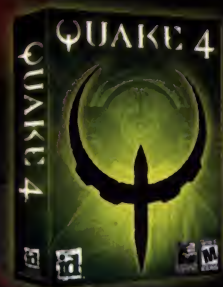


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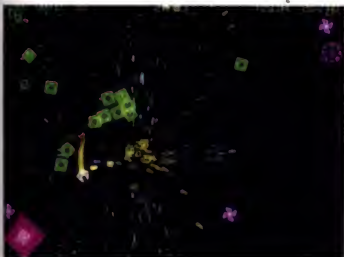
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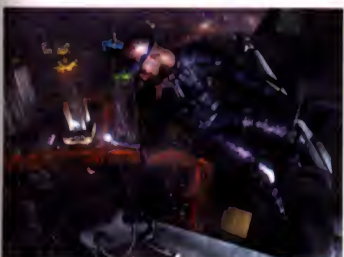
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AMAZING READER COMPO! 114

WIN!
A FOSSIL
DIGITAL
WATCH!

LOOKINGBACK RETRO

RetroZONE

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UPFRONT OF THE MONTH

NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

BUT HOW?

SIX OF THE BEST

WHAT IS NAME?

NAME FRAME

BACK IN THE DAY...

RETRO ZONE!

130 RETRO ZONE
Our award-deserving retro section makes a triumphant return! This month, classic Nintendo on your desktop!

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New ways to scare, slash, stab, kill and survive.



Nintendo



Use the stylus as a knife and lash out at the undead as they come on smarter and faster than ever. Test your sanity in a fully 3D world of claustrophobia and tension, then drag your friends in with you for a bout of wireless multiplayer horror. Resident Evil Deadly Silence out on 31.03.06

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This is a classic action-adventure game which we described as "a near-seamless gaming experience... Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince".
PC ZONE verdict 84%



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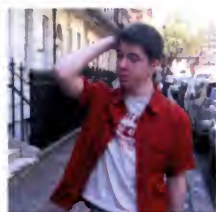
Closing date: June 22, 2006

UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

Here we come, walkin' down the street...



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff Writer

AGE: 19 (and a bit)

LIKES: Dead mice

DISLIKES: Alive mice

FANCIES: Half the third floor

FAVOURITE GAME: *Frontier: Elite II*

PLAYING NOW: *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*

This week, the crafty young snapper from Dublin has had a haircut. His makeover has perked him up so much, he's been walking around with his chest puffed out, whistling a tune so cheerful that gorgeous little cartoon sparrows have nested in the kitchen area. Yesir, it's summertime on Hogarty's head, and he couldn't be happier. The whole 'lunch in the park, it might be summer' feeling has been driven home by Steve reviewing the new *Ghost Recon*, set in sunny Mexico City. Death, hair, dust, lunch and sparrows; just one month of Steve's amazing life.



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Staff Writer

This month, Log went to a castle and drank himself into a state where he could only say: "I should go to bed now." He's now renounced alcohol in favour of a diet of crushed berries.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Civilization IV (for my sins)



SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Editor

The redoubtable Ms Wallace has been caught claiming that being outside in the fresh air is a good, healthy thing to do. Only her talk of unicorns made us realise she was still talking about *Oblivion*.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

GTR 2 and *Hitman: Blood Money*



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor

Jamie recently went to Shanghai and stayed in a hotel so high it disappeared into the mist. He also brought everyone back a Chairman Mao badge - who says northerners are tight?

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

GridWars 2



TEAM CVG

Website Wonders

This month, team CVG created the new www.computerandvideogames.com and the similarly spiffy www.pczone.co.uk. John, Stu, Andy, Matt, Korn and Andy (2), we salute you.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

JavaScript



WILL PORTER

Deputy Editor

Will's been to E3 - the closest gaming has to the saturation chamber from House on Haunted Hill. He spent the event covering under a table, patting a severed booth babe's foot in his pocket.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Civilization IV: Warlords



DOMINIK DIAMOND

Not the Messiah

This month, Dominik's been in the news for deciding against being nailed to a large piece of wood. What with the risk of tetanus though, we can't help but think it was a wise move.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

God

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... *Lost*, summer days in Regents Park and singing "Can you hear the bells fer Nando's?"
STUFF THAT'S BEEN OF NO HELP WHATSOEVER... Insects in kitchens, the MP3 jobsworth patrol and a still-bloody-faulty boiler

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

COMBOBULATING FOR AN EVisCERATING 99 Mins And other criminally underused phrases

PRIESTS 12 Mins A famous Archbishop felt Jamie's brother's bum once

FRAGGING AND GIBBING 3 Mins But why not frigging?

NINTENDO WII 278 Mins Our Wii jokes have slowed to a trickle now...

THE HOMICIDAL OBLIVION UNICORN 55 Mins Just when Suzy thinks she's safe, the homicidal unicorn finds her again

GHOST RECON 149 Mins Steve's insistence that every few moments we "come look at this, it's amazing"

"WE'LL BEE PIRATES... ONE DAY!!!!!!" 25 Mins Will and Steve's need for pirate-themed press trips becomes an impromptu improvised musical

OUR LOVELY NEW WEBSITE 43 Mins Oooh - it's all new and shiny! Yes sir, we do like it

"YOU RANG M'LORD?" 15 Mins And the promotion and demotion of *Hi-de-Hi* actors that occurred therein

MEAD 55 Mins The production, storage and consumption of the medieval brew and its role in modern-day society

WIN!

Tiny Compo. Give us the correct answer to the mini-question on the cover and you might win some fabbo prizes. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (169), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. We'll put them all in a big brown bag and get Steve to blow it up and whichever entry pings an innocent passer-by in the eye first wins something. We're not telling what though - it's a surprise... Closing date: June 21, 2006. The winner of issue 167's Tiny Compo was Stephen Little from Harrow, who knew that the name of Alyx's canine companion was Dog. Consider yourself a clever fella, sir.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

LETTERS

Jamie Sefton slashes open the postbag for your delight...



POSTER BOY

Cheers for the free *Rise Of Legends* poster mag with last month's issue – really smart. It'll definitely brighten up my study in the cellar (my girlfriend refuses to let me blu-tack it to the living room wall). Can we look forward to any more freebies in the coming months? How about an *Oblivion* poster? JonnyBoy

Glad you liked the poster JonnyBoy. Yes, we're currently looking into more free gifts in forthcoming issues of *PC ZONE* – but not the *Oblivion* poster. Other rejected ideas include a Pippa Funnell horse riding kit (including free salt lick) and a Davilex T-shirt.

HASTA LA VISTA

Are other PC gamers as worried as me about Microsoft's decision to release *Halo 2* as a Windows Vista-only title? I know it's been delayed until next year now, but I dislike the idea that the company seems to be deliberately forcing us to upgrade to their new PC operating system, which is bound to cause innumerable problems and conflicts with my other games that most likely won't be compatible without heavy patching and faffing about. Peter Blake

I don't think this is going to be an issue for at least a year – and anyway, nobody is going to upgrade to Vista just to play a three-year-old Xbox title. However, Crytek recently said that while their stunning shooter *Crysis* (page 24) will work fine with XP, the game will also be one of the first to take full advantage of the new DX10 graphics technology. It's looking inevitable that we'll all have to bite the bullet and upgrade at some point in the future – we'll have an interview with Microsoft about their plans for PC gaming next issue.

ANGER MANAGEMENT

I play games a lot, but there's one title I always go back to – *Pro Evolution Soccer 5*. In my mind, it's the best and also the worst game in the history of videogaming.

However, for some reason when I begin to lose, I get really, really annoyed and blame my losing on everything from a badly placed pass to the game being against me. Here are some of the things I've apparently uttered in my rages over *Pro Evo*: "I hate this f***ing game, it's so shit!"; "What the f*** was that?"; "Why the bloody hell did he just pass to your player?"; "Oh my god, throw-ins are so terrible!"; "Oh my god, free kicks



are so terrible!"; "Why do my players only play bad passes? I don't understand!"; "His touch is so shit!"; Do you get this annoyed over any other games? Will (the magician)

I know the feeling Will. I didn't get the moniker 'angry' Sefton for nothing – my Tourette's-style PES rages are legendary in the office. In the past, ex-editor Dave Woods and freelancer Anthony Holden nearly came to blows over a *Quake III* deathmatch, and our regular drubbing at the hands of our readers in the monthly Fight Club usually inspire the odd tantrum. Anybody else have any games that leave them with blood boiling?

IN A FLAP (AGAIN)

I'll start by quoting something... 'Don't worry David, you've seen the last of our flaps'. The flaps in issue 160 hacked me off, but they were really cool pictures so I let it slide. Then a couple of issues later (162) you, Mr Sefton, promised us that we had 'seen the last of our flaps'. I was happy with that, as I felt I'd got a promise from *PC ZONE* which was good enough for me. We had the wool pulled



Letter of the Month

THE PRICE IS RIGHT?

Here's a thing. After your unabashed Valve love-in of a few months past I got to thinking. Sure, a lot of the games on Steam are great – but who's watching the pricing? Buy a game from a shop and they'll have deals on, trade-ins and direct competitors on the high street and online, so they'll be slightly inclined to think of lowering prices. Valve, however, can just pluck a price of \$50 (or whatever) out of the air and make it a standard – not good for the buyer, especially when episodic gaming is going to see everything get shorter and shorter. I'm not a Valve-hater, far from it, but there's no watchdog for artificially high pricing with download services is there? John Phipps

Absolutely John. Plus, Steam does away with the second-hand market – it won't let you re-install games on a different machine unless you pay a \$10 charge. Obviously, EA and others still sell Valve games in the shops, which will have an affect on pricing, but we're going to see a huge increase in purely online sales – and who is watching the price? You raise a valid point – have a graphics card.

WIN!



ONE OF THESE!

You need a good graphics card. We need letters. (Good ones, mind, not rubbish ones like 'PC ZONE rulez, can I have a graphics card please?')

Well, serendipity now! The two needs have collided, right here, right now. Write us a letter today. If it wins Letter of the Month, we'll send you a superb Connect3D X1600 Pro 512MB!

SAY WHAT?

"I'm really disappointed with you. Go back to your corner and think about what you've done!"

Go on Sefton. Do as William Richardson says...

over our eyes a bit though, didn't we? I picked up my copy of *PC ZONE* issue 167 and was shocked to find flaps. And this time you can't blame Woods because you made this promise matey, not him. I'm disappointed with you. Go back to your corner and think about what you've done!

William Richardson

Ah, yes... Erm, right. You see, last time I said that I wasn't completely sure we'd never have flaps again, but now I am. Therefore, I say now William that categorically, I'm 100% positive, you've seen the last of our flaps. Definitely.

OLDER AND BOLDER

I write with reference to the June issue and the letter of the month 'Over The Hill'. I play on the oldest machine in the house and am angling for a revamp for my birthday (the big half century). I believe a new video card would help... Anyway, I love playing online games, but the youngsters come out with some incredulous phrases when they find I'm old enough to be their grandma, a common one being: "Wow, that's cool, I couldn't get my mum to play!" Either

that or they just don't believe I'm not only female but old too – sigh, such stereotyping! In any case, thanks *PC ZONE* (and other forms of the mag that we've been reading over the past 13 years or so) for keeping me up-to-date and giving me something to talk about at the dinner table as my two lads grew up!

Mrs R P Baillie (Penny)

Thanks Penny – it's great to know that our 'more mature' readers can still cut it with da kidz online. One of the great things about PC gaming is that the demographic is so wide – we have readers aged 7-70 who are all as passionate about games as each other. Long may it continue.

MULTI-PLATFORM CRAP

For some time now, a creeping sense of dread has been making itself felt in the back of my mind. Are money-hungry publishers destroying the whole point of PC gaming? They've made the word 'multi-platform release' a curse in my vocabulary. Look at what happened to *Deus Ex 2*. Look at what happened to *Rainbow Six*. These and many other series have been effectively castrated, removing the very essence of what made



Dancing with a hammer isn't as easy as you think.

them special, in favour of courting a 'mainstream' (ie console) public.

Now, the very reason I invest in a decent (and expensive) gaming PC is because I find PC games to be far superior to the low-brow crap that's usually released on consoles. Do the publishers really think they'll earn more money with this approach?

Last time I checked, *Rainbow Six* fans were crying for Ubisoft blood, not praising their games. The problem is, I don't think publishers care. Please tell me I'm an arse and an idiot, and that PC gaming has a glorious future ahead of it. Thanks for a great mag by the way...

David Diamant

Don't worry David, you're an arse and an idiot. As I've said before, the PC has a very bright future. Huge multi-

Having just had another row with me missus about how I obviously prefer living in the X Universe rather than showing her attention, I got to thinking: which games have ended most relationships? kinkygrover

Based on some of the wedding and relationship-related forums my fiancée occasionally visits, I think *World Of Warcraft* may well have been sponsored by divorce lawyers... :D cjlw101

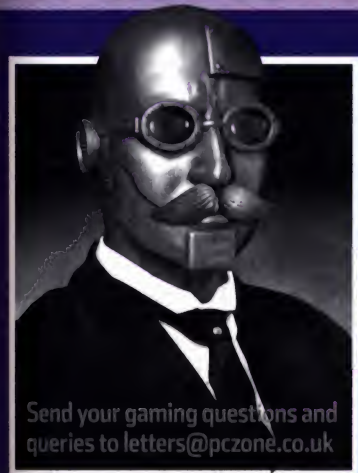
Some games can bring people together. I know a couple (now married) who played through the whole of *Morrowind* together, one doing the mouse and the other the keyboard. -Doomus-

Bought my missus *The Sims 2* to try to get her involved. She was hooked for two days until I found out she'd based the characters on us. She had a go at me when my character kept seducing the neighbour! kinkygrover

Join in the forum fun at www.pczone.co.uk

MY IRON JUNG

For three years *ZONE* staff members have worked to craft renowned creator of analytical psychology, Dr Carl Jung (1875-1961), out of metal. A fount of knowledge, fed with gaming data from past and present, he exists for your enlightenment...



Send your gaming questions and queries to letters@pczone.co.uk

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q What's happening with *Project Offset* – that crazy, beautiful FPS multiplayer game with the rideable dragons and the *Savage* bits?

Derek Sprack

A Work on *Project Offset* continues apace – what was once three developers working out of an apartment is now 19 gentlemen of programming worth. *Project Offset* turned many a head at the recent GDC. I agree that its snarling orcs, rideable dragons, budding co-op modes and intriguing multiplayer truly make it quite special. The *Offset* contingent have also sold their technology to a group known as Red 5, an offshoot from the loins of Blizzard, for use in a sparkling new MMO. A hugely exciting prospect...

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q I found something on the Web about a game called *The Lost*. It's by Irrational – how come I haven't heard of it?

Jon Chandra

A *The Lost* was a PS2 launch that, oh cruel irony, was nigh-completed but lost in legal nightmares after the slow collapse of publisher Crave Entertainment. The rights for the happy tale of a daughter's trip into hell to visit the soul of her suicidal dead mother were, however, recently bought back by Irrational – who've teamed up with FX Labs to renew development and bring the game up to modern standards. Now set for PC and Xbox, and using Unreal Engine 2.5, the recent takeover of Irrational by Take Two would suggest it won't be long before we see it in its refound glory.

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

platform publishers such as EA still have PC-only exclusive games such as *Crysis* and *Spore*, the PC's emulation ability is unrivalled (check out our new Retro Zone on page 130), we're constantly pushing new graphics and game technology and we have a hugely successful indie game scene that's spawned titles including Dan Marshall's *Gibbage* (page 90). Oh, and you get to read us every month too...

FREEMAN'S CATALOGUE

Alyx, the gaming Aphrodite, does wear the coolest clothes, as do all the members of City 17. Tell me your partner wouldn't look totally hot in a blue jumpsuit? Valve are missing out on a massive market here – if it was £100 for an HEV Suite Mk IV, with the eerily sexy voice telling you you're about to die, how many people would buy it? I certainly would! And with a Black Mesa hoodie, I could walk into Bluewater shopping mall with it and look harmless – who's afraid of a nerd in gaming apparel?

Lewis

A range of *Half-Life 2* toys would be much cooler – sign me up for a life-size remote-controlled Dog now!

HALF-LIFE 2 – ENOUGH ALREADY

Is it me, or does *Half-Life 2* seem to get more attention in games magazines than Jade Goody gets in *Heat*? Giving monthly

PC ZONE Around the World



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

back rubs to Valve is getting a little tiresome. We all know how good *HL2* is, but do we need it drilled into our heads? I see the importance of both games and completed the sequel in three days.

However, do I want to play it again in a hurry? Not massively. Will I be paying for the new episode? I'm not so sure. I'm more enthralled by *SiN Episodes: Emergence*. And did we really need to Supertest *HL2* last issue?

At the risk of sounding like the guy who dared to voice a different opinion at a village meeting and subsequently received a barrage of rocks to his face, it needs to be said there's more to life than *Half-Life*. *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is proving far more enthralling on a personal note, and scores admirably in your magazine; but

will it receive as much attention? I doubt it. Come on guys – time to move on. Simon Busby

Half-Life 2 is one of the best games ever, and the forthcoming *Episode One* will be one of the gaming highlights of 2006. It's our job to cover the games that matter, which is why we had the exclusive 20-page Valve feature in issue 167 on the Steam phenomenon. However, we do cover other games too! This issue for example, we have exclusives on *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, *UT2007*, *Huxley*, *Crysis* and the new *F.E.A.R.* expansion. As for *Oblivion*, we're currently putting the finishing touches to a major feature on the game for next issue.

NOB HILL

Any chance I could see that pic of Steve Hill as a female elf holding what looks like something rude again? Darren Cheshire

Certainly Mr Cheshire. Here you go...



IDIOT'S CORNER

Real calls from real idiots...

PCZONE

Hello, PC ZONE.

IDIOT

Hello, I'm calling from a popular TV news station. I heard from my barber that you guys were playing *FIFA 2006* and that each time you played, England won the World Cup.

PCZONE

Erm, no. We haven't been playing *FIFA 2006*...

IDIOT

Oh. Are you sure because he said you were...

PCZONE

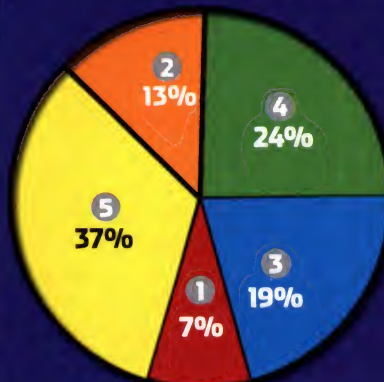
We're sure we're not playing *FIFA*.

IDIOT

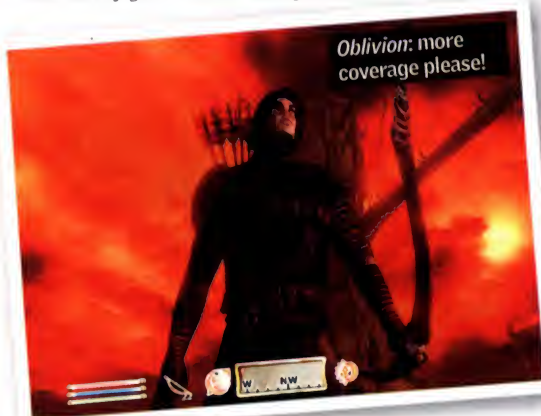
Oh OK. Bye! (Hangs up)

The Big Question

Aside from sub-oceanic stem-cell harvesting little girls in *Bioshock*, what's the creepiest gaming moment?



- 1 Sam Fisher dragging his teeth along a mile-long blackboard.
- 2 Irregular squelching sounds from the left earphone in *TOCA*.
- 3 Lara Croft pushing a tit hard against her Butler's ankle.
- 4 That level in *Darwinia* when 500 faceless children sing *I Want To Hold Your Hand*.
- 5 The cow from *Black & White* rubbing lion muck on her udders and laughing.



WHOSE SIDE WILL YOU BE ON?



HUGH JACKMAN HALLE BERRY

X-MEN

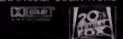
THE LAST STAND

IN CINEMAS NOW

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT A DONNERS' COMPANY PRODUCTION A BRETT RATNER FILM HUGH JACKMAN HALLE BERRY "X-MEN THE LAST STAND" IAN MCKELLEN FAMKE JANSSEN ANNA PAQUIN KELSEY GRAMMER JAMES MARSDEN REBECCA ROMAJN SHAWN ASHMORE AARON STANFORD VINNIE JONES AND PATRICK STEWART COSTUME DESIGNER JUDIANNA MAKOVSKY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOHN BRUNO PRODUCED BY JOHN POWELL DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROSS FANGER EDITOR JAMES M. FREITAG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MARK HELFRICH A.C.E. MARK GOLDBLATT A.C.E. JULIA WONG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS EDWARD VERREAUX PRODUCED BY DANTE SPINOTTI ASC/AIC EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS STAN LEE KEVIN FEIGE JOHN PALERMO PRODUCED BY LAUREN SHULER DONNER RALPH WINTER AVI ARAD PRODUCED BY SIMON KINGBERG & ZAK PENN DIRECTED BY BRETT RATNER



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An aerial, high-angle view of a city in a state of total war. The scene is bathed in a hazy, orange light, suggesting either dawn or dusk. In the foreground, a large, multi-story building has been reduced to a skeletal frame of steel beams and charred wood. To its left, another building stands more intact but shows signs of damage. The streets are littered with debris, and numerous small figures of soldiers can be seen moving across the landscape. In the upper right, a helicopter is in flight, and a tank is visible on the ground. The overall atmosphere is one of desolation and intense conflict.

COVER STORY

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: Tiberium Wars

As the tiberian sun begins to set over the battlefield, a new force becomes visible in the twilight...



WHEN WAS THE last time you heard the soft tinkle of a harvester dropping its precious load into a tiberium silo? When, indeed, was the last time that you heard a stocky military man informing you that he had a present for ya? Probably an age ago – before the somewhat stolid and current affairs-y Command & Conquer: Generals. But now, the resurgence of the old school is upon us – GDI and Nod are back and ready to break some heads. The most important RTS franchise there is has gone back to its roots – and Kane, that purveyor of most excellent FMV gurning, is coming back with it. One vision, one purpose!

PAGE

54

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UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

Can I help?

NO. NO, I don't need your help. Partly because you're spotty, pale and 16 years old. Partly because I'm sure you're being paid to nudge me towards a copy of *FIFA Street*. No, honestly it's fine – I've bought games before. I will survive.

There's nothing more liable to send me into a hissy fit than being accosted by an inept customer service youth working for a high street gaming store. They're there to explain the intricacies of youth culture and its exorbitant pricing to baffled mothers – I can understand that. But they're also convinced that I, an increasingly chubby man in his mid-20s with unkempt hair and ketchup stains on his jeans, need to have my hand held in the world of videogames. Has the world gone mad?

True enough. I was looking for *SingStar* on PS2 as part of a peace offering for the missus (we'll keep that by the wayside), but when I finally found it, in a musty, friendly backstreet second-hand gaming emporium, everything was so much nicer. Me and the man behind the counter had a quick chat about the Nintendo DS Lite, we pondered upon the levelling-up system in *Oblivion* – I even gave him a tip and a nod on my personal love of *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*. As I left, having picked up some rare-ish games I'd had my eye on for a while, I realised I was living out *High Fidelity* in videogame form. My gaming knowledge had won the approval of the wise sage behind the second-hand counter: I had become an established game snob. And I felt good. I am nerd – hear me roar. *SingStar* was also good.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

BEHOLD THE FUTURE

ZONE gets all cosy on the settee with Marcus Nilsson – senior producer on the fantabulous *Battlefield 2142*

www.ea.com | ETA: Autumn

Traditionally, the *Battlefield* series has used historical or near-future settings. What prompted the decision to go so far ahead in the future?

"We've been thinking about this for years. For something like *Battlefield*, it's easy for us to go into the future because for the first time ever, we make things up and we can make things that fit perfectly into the world of *Battlefield*. It's all about the toys and the equipment, the vehicles and how you use them. And if you can start designing how they work, then you can build upon them. We're now reaching a level where we make it more interesting to play the game."

So rather than building it around a pre-set scenario, the gameplay comes

first? You're not restricted, like in *Vietnam*, to crawling through jungles?

"Exactly. The way you start out when you make a game like *Vietnam* is you go reference hunting; you Google up 'Tiger Tank' or whatever. This time, you need to have a very clear vision of where you want to go."

Is it harder to invent stuff from scratch?

"It's far more creative, far more inspiring to do it. At the same time it's more pressure, because you need to make things look good and interesting, because you don't have a template to follow. It's important to have a strong vision from an art standpoint and from a game design standpoint to be able to do a game like this."

Is the Ice Age scenario a reference to global warming or just something that fitted in with the game's style?

"We wanted to find an

interesting scenario where we knew people would be pushed together towards the area we wanted. It's quite a convenient thing happening to the world. At the same time, it raises the point of global warming."

Will you actually get to fight over the frozen areas?

"Yeah, part of the fact that we wanted to go with ice is so we can make very interesting levels with it. We also have levels where the ice pretty much invades the level. What's the name of that movie? *The Day After Tomorrow* – if you reference that you're quite close to what some of the levels will look like."

How do you go about predicting the year 2142?

"The world is not *Star Trek*. There's no lasers, no plasma guns – this is a dirty, gritty and brutal world where you're fighting to survive. We're keeping it interesting and making the stuff we have very compelling."

Oops, that van got a bit of a fright.



STOP PRESS!

Marvel RPG!

The chaps at Raven are making an action RPG that'll let you be one of 20 heroes (even though everyone will want to be Wolverine).

Superior Soccer

The sixth iteration of *Pro Evo* has been announced – with added emphasis on marking rival strikers and improved shooting. Evolution, not revolution. Still great.

Scary Soccer

Three-on-three martial arts football – *Soccer Fury* is NCsoft's answer to street soccer – and it's just as odd as it sounds. Cantona is said to approve.

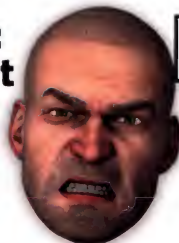
24 Crysis

Our minds get slightly more boggled every time we see it. There's no other FPS on the radar quite as exciting as this...



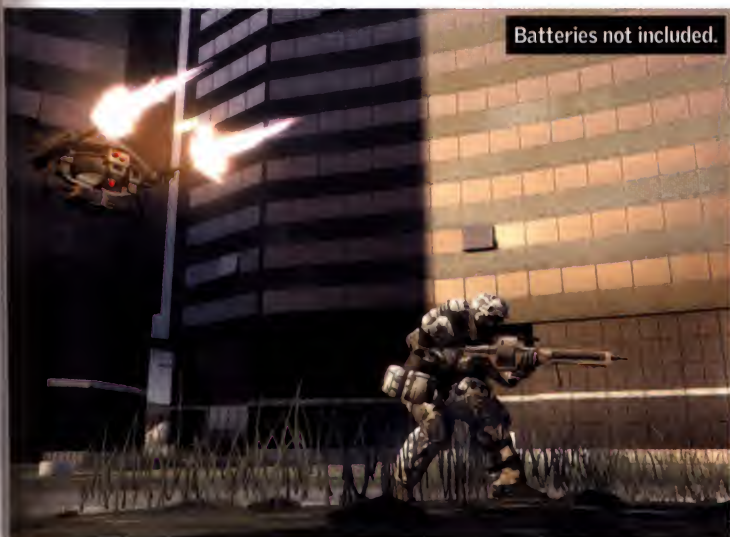
44 Splinter Cell: Double Agent

Sefton went all the way to Shanghai and brought us back six communist badges and this shiny six-page feature.

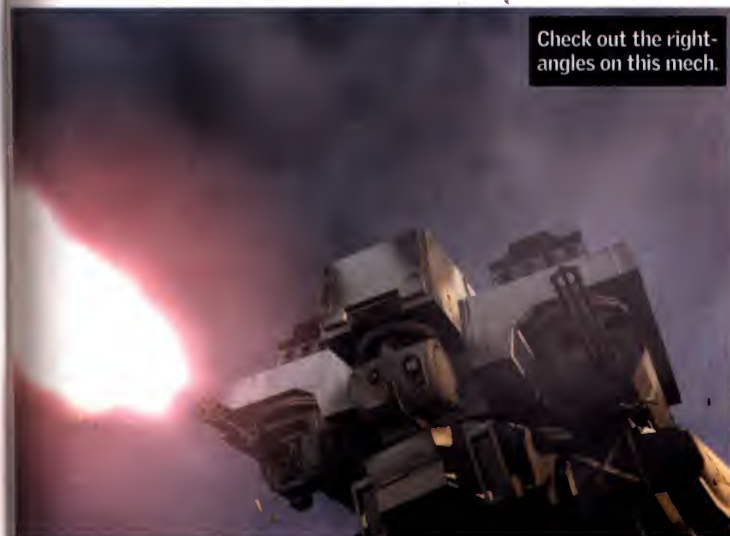


54 Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

Kane is back! We tip the Nod to the goatee that launched a thousand banshees. Hurrah!



Batteries not included.



Check out the right-angles on this mech.



"Run away! Mysterious orange gas!"

It's a gas

Frontlines: Fuel Of War fills our tank

www.kaosstudios.com | ETA: 2007

FORMED LAST YEAR by former Trauma Studios staff – the team behind *Battlefield 2*'s popular *Desert Combat* mod – Kaos Studios have announced their first game.

Frank DeLise, general manager and lead designer, told us: "*Frontlines: Fuel Of War* is an open-world, infantry- and vehicle-based FPS with advanced next-generation weaponry in a near-future setting. A lot of the weapons in *Desert Combat* and *Battlefield 2* were modern weapons – we want to take *Frontlines* to where technology is going next. We've taken the designs that are out there, added a little Kaos theory and created over 60 vehicles and weapons that you get to use in the game."

Such as? "Things like guncams that shoot around corners, remote-controlled

drones that you can fly into a room and find out where enemies are and blow them up, destroyable sentry guns and a remote-controlled car that you can blow tanks up with..."



Men shooting other men...

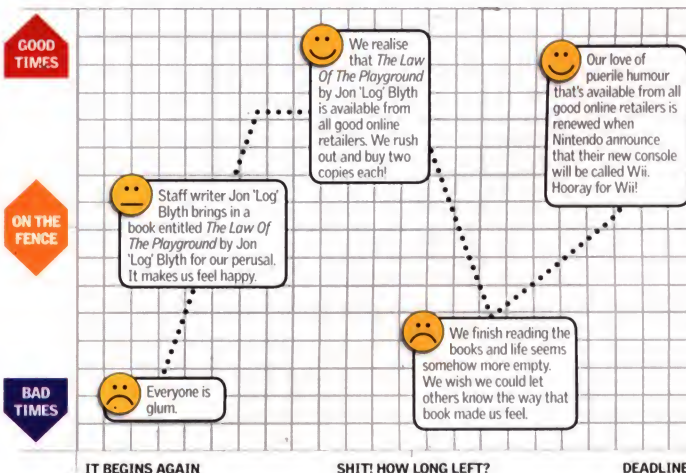


...And stuff exploding.

STUFF

Games usually want you to choose between being good or evil – *Overlord*, on the other hand wants you to choose between being evil and bloody evil. That's the pitch for the new Codies title – looking all the world like the game where *Fable* and *Dungeon Keeper* collide. Packed with a ton of dark rip-offs of common fantasy situations and a bunch of impish minions to order about the place, we'll have more next month.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER





Dear Jon 'Log' Blyth,

I was leaving my house this morning when I slipped on the fetid, rotting corpse of a rat before falling face-first with my mouth agape on a fresh, toasty dog turd. As I stood up and brushed myself off, I said to nobody in particular: "Hey, it could've been worse, I could've had to watch the *Doom* movie again – that movie was really, really bad." I just wanted to share this thought with you today via the medium of electronic mail, in the hopes that you'd disagree and this conversation would appear in the 'Argue The Toss' section of *PC ZONE*.

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

It's strange you should say that, because this entire last week my skin has been bristling with an open-hearted fondness for the film. The best analogy I can think of is a one-legged kitten. Some people, in the name of kindness, would smash its head in with a rock. I prefer to watch it crawl around and laugh, as it rolls around helplessly and makes a panicky mess. *Doom* entertained me in exactly this way, and for that, I love it. Do you really want to murder the kittens, Steve? Is that how you want to live your life?

Jon 'Log' Blyth

Dear Jon,

Your vague and inaccurate kitten metaphors can't save you from this one Log – if that is your real name. There's no enjoyment to be derived from this movie, none whatsoever, and if you even begin to support or appreciate its existence in any way, ironic or otherwise, then you're perpetuating the flow of awful game-to-movie conversions we're subjected to almost yearly now. I mean, The Rock didn't even do the People's Elbow on a cacodemon. Now that would've made it worth watching. SH

Dear Steve,

Doom doesn't stand up to an ironic enjoyment – it's far too polished a... Kitten... For that. Whatever guilty enjoyment I distilled from this bum-grape was untainted by a pompous sense of knowing. Watching *Doom* was more like doing a really noisy fart that somehow smells of fresh herbs – you have no right to expect anything other than a fart, so when the fresh herbs come, you think, "Hey, that's not unforgivably bad." Usefully, I can come up with metaphors to avoid talking about the actual film all day. JB

Dear Jon,

That bit when it went into first-person was really embarrassing though. SH

Dear Steve,

Jesus, you're not kidding. After around 50, I stopped counting how many times I died inside. JB

COMMAND AND LIBERATE

RTS gets a humanitarian makeover in the peace-loving *Joint Task Force*

Developer: HD Publishing/Mithis | Publisher: VU Games | www.vugames.co.uk

JOINT TASK FORCE isn't quite like the other kids in the RTS playground. Instead of focusing on conquest, crushing enemies and amassing enough gold to fill the teeth of a toothy giant, its premise is one of liberation and peace. Thankfully though, you still get to blast the hell out your enemies before a ceasefire is agreed.

Set to ship with five diverse campaigns set in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Columbia, you'll marshal a limited number of modern-day troops as you seek to free each country from a suitably evil oppressor. So far, it's all sounding pretty standard, but here's the twist – there's no resource collection. Instead, the game's only resource – money – will be amassed by performing humanitarian tasks, though these are more likely to be more of the 'liberate a refugee camp' ilk than 'dig a well and plant an orchard' type.

There won't be any base building either. Before you'll be able to call in any notable reinforcements, you'll first have to storm an enemy airport or capture an airstrip, after which your new hardware will be

dropped at the newly acquired landing zone. You'll also be able to call in air strikes that'll pepper an area with cluster bombs or send in the A-10 Tank Killers to bust some armoured ass.

While the visuals aren't yet looking anywhere near as eye-popping as the likes of *Rome: Total War* or *The Battle For Middle-Earth 2*, there will be plenty of eye candy on offer, including ragdoll physics that'll propel men through the air like, er, ragdolls, and real-time weather effects that'll influence line-of-sight and other tactical parameters.

If all that won't do you, then how about co-operative multiplayer for each campaign which will see you and a sidekick bringing peace to many of the world's most troubled spots, with the exception of Corby. What more could you ask?



Ah, tanks! A caption-writer's dream.



Violence in the name of peace. Very political.

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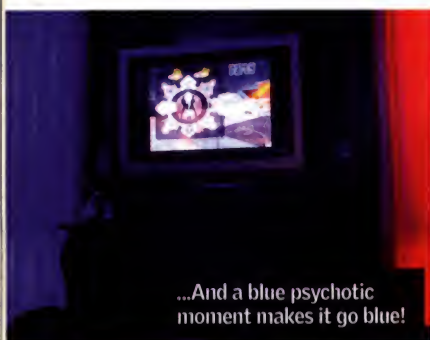
PERIPHERAL VISION



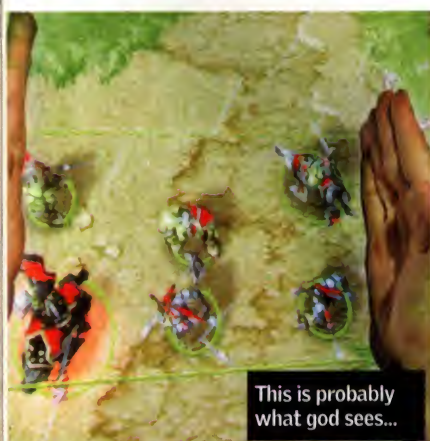
Fancy a bit on the side? Immersive game technology is a shock to the senses...



A yellow fiery moment makes it go yellow...



...And a blue psychotic moment makes it go blue!



This is probably what god sees...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

DEEP IN THE musty bowels of the LA Convention Centre, at the annual E3 Expo, a collection of geeks, genius boffins and snake-oil salesman peddle their PC peripheral wears. Look! A mouse that you can attach to your head, transforming placid gamers into head-bobbing Tourette's victims. Yonder! A techno golf club that'd take out a lampshade, or at least the family dog, when swung in confined living-quarters. Erm, Jane Fonda and a big sweaty-arsed exercise gamebike!

Seeing as the whole point of gaming is to grow a belly and spill kebab batter over yourself, the latter contraption, probably TM'd with a silly name like 'Ironman' or 'Cateye', is hardly up our street. Daft gaming enhancements, like the chunky plywood Gameulator cabinet with its odd-smelling plastic curtains much mocked in *PC ZONE*s past, are more faddish than skirt lengths – proving that aside from essential sound and graphics cards, the entire peripheral market remains as much a cultural oddity as Peter Andre.

But change is afoot, announces Richard Rouse III, evil genius behind

The Suffering. "The growth of the home theatre in the States is a really interesting trend. It's expanded beyond the hardcore AV enthusiast to incorporate casual tech nerds, though it's still definitely a niche group of people who're using it. Surround sound used to be a total novelty, but it's undeniable that more and more people have it."

KEEPING IT REAL

Could advancing home theatres turn games into fun-park rides? David Eves, chief technology officer and founder of Philips amBX reckons so. According to Eves, amBX will create a full sensory surround experience by allowing developers to use real-world light, colour, sound, heat and airflow during gameplay.

"Lighting, fans, heaters and rumble peripherals will all react in the context of the game. If you're walking through a lightning storm, your lights will flicker; if you're sat on a rollercoaster, fans will turn on and blow your hair around; if you jump into the sea, your lighting will turn blue." We dread to ask what happens if someone sticks an axe through your collarbone.

Another innovative area of game immersion is touch-screen technology. It's good to touch – unless you're fondling a stranger on a night bus – and

what could be better than a table-top platform that allows opponents to play head-on, literally.

Researchers at Mitsubishi recently built Diamond Touch, a table that plays *Warcraft III* via gestures and speech – a video of which can be found on this month's DVD. Pan the map with your hand, select units with a single finger or scream orders at your troops.

Edward Tse, one of the project co-ordinators, elaborates: "Diamond Touch's hand gestures provide a feeling similar to manipulating physical objects such as a gun in an arcade. In one example, we show two people using their hand to pick up a digital table in *The Sims*."

Interior designing for Simian bastards is, however, topped by gathering your mates around a big fat monitor and proceeding to point and shout like you're in a Washington war room. "Table-top games are not replacements for mouse and keyboards," Tse adds. "Rather, they represent a new genre of gaming where people can interact face-to-face rather than looking away from each other, as we do with current PC games."

GET THE TABLE!

All this sounds fantastic, but such gadgetry could leave your grandchildren in debt. amBX will require numerous



...And this is probably how god operates.

Create Tree

Okay



Ever wondered what a fly sees when he plays *Quake*?

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel.barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



The Novint Falcon: a mouse, but not as you know it...

"If you're walking through a storm, your lights will flicker; if you jump into the sea, your lighting will turn blue"

David Eves, founder, Philips amBX

peripherals, including LED colour-controlled lights, active furniture, fans, heaters, audio and video. Although the finished set-up will provide the ultimate immersive PC game experience, and create a game den like 50 Cent's crib (presumably minus the beyatches), it's unlikely to come cheap.

Meanwhile, large display touch-screens are already available from companies like Mitsubishi: a snip at \$25,000. When cornered on the subject of price, Edward Tse points out that in the space of 30 years, million-dollar computers, the size of rooms, have been compacted into friendly laptops. "We should expect to see stuff like Diamond Touch in homes within the five to seven year mark at incredibly affordable prices," he suggests. Until then, most of us shall stick to our faithful mice. Mind you, even these aren't safe from innovative tweaks.

Bid welcome to the Novint Falcon. Despite looking like a prop from 70's sci-fi *Buck Rogers*, this mouse-replacement adds a new dimension to

gaming: interactive touch. The Falcon lets you feel weight, shape, texture, dimension and force effects. "For the first time you can feel what a game character feels: the weight of a basketball as you throw it towards a hoop, the momentum and impact of a virtual golf club as it swings and connects with a ball, or the clash of a sword against an opponent. Instead of using mouse clicks or meters, you can control a game more intuitively," explains Novint's Antonia Chappell.

TOUCHY-FEELY

Early reviews of the device suggest a fluid, subtle and realistic controller, and with a US launch price tag of \$100, it's also affordable. But like many immersive game peripherals, the Novint Falcon only works with touch-enabled games. Such is the case with the amBX system.

"Developers are integral in the creative process for amBX," says David Eves. "The recent GDC saw the announcement of Revolution Software and Sumo Digital as the first official amBX developers."

Personal attachments

You won't poo right for a week with these unendorsed 'interactive' peripherals. Thrustmaster, step aside...



The Buttkicker Gamer

Strap the Buttkicker to your chair and it'll turn a game's bass sounds into arse-tingling vibrations. One gun shot equals one bum wobble. Probably best not to use it with any game that has a dance track to it.



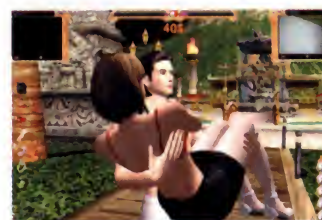
Rez Trance Vibrator

OK, so it's for a console, but how could we ignore it. Plug it into your PS2, watch the pretty colours then lie back and enjoy! Sleek, throbbing and, ahem, tested by the nice ladies at gamegirladvance.com. Is there a higher endorsement?



Atari Vibrator

It's been mooted that the classic Atari joystick can aid, ahem, stimulation. "I'd suggest (using it with) *Space Invaders*, because it gets faster and faster and then climaxes," suggests a rep from Homemade Sex Toys.



3Feel

This one's endorsed... And endowed. A Korean sex MMO packaged with a dildo that plugs into a USB port. Don't worry, as soon as its out you can guarantee Steve Hill will have a NeverQuest he'll never be able to forget. Bwahahaha!

The Suffering's Richard Rouse III reckons that developers simply can't pledge allegiance to every peripheral on the market. "I tend to focus on the experience that the majority of players are going to have, and that means ignoring novelty gadgets. Only 1% of the gaming public is going to have purchased most of these esoteric items, so it doesn't make sense to spend a lot of time developing specifically for them. Time and budgets are tight enough as it is."

Well, how about you create your own immersive peripheral instead? Andrew Sabri, an undergraduate researcher at Virginia Tech, tiled 24 17-inch Dell LCD monitors on a custom-built framework, then built 12 Linux servers, each with a dual-head graphics card. The result? *Quake* on 24 monitors and a 10240x3072 resolution.


"While most people can't afford all of those monitors and servers, the system is extremely scalable and uses off-the-shelf hardware," grins Sabri. "We've found that even using four monitors greatly



enhances the gaming experience and is much more affordable."

As the arcade endures a prolonged death rattle, it's only natural that the quest for immersive gaming should reach our homes. Perhaps the future of peripherals is not in the hands of corporations, but gamers. Failing the arrival of a fully immersive home theatre, why not conscript a friend to switch your lights on and off and rattle your chair. Now there's an idea that'd attract attention at E3... **PCZ**




 Insert 'Korea in the army' gag here...

ETA
Early
2007

DRY YOUR EYES MATE... **CRYSIS**

Standing on an oddly familiar beach, *Will Porter* meets the men turning a drama into a you-know-what...

DEVELOPER Crytek PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.crytek.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 168

THE LOWDOWN

Continually evolving and surprising gameplay



Physics, AI, graphics – all top notch



Even the ammo load-out is ingenious



Freeze-ray! Woo!



Like *Far Cry*, only better



A bit short despite the replay value



JAKE DUNN. Now there's a real hero's name: two syllables and a surname that's the past participle of a common verb. Give the man a gun and a liberal sprinkle of stubble and he'll save the world in a flash. Or, perhaps, in 12 hours of post-*Far Cry* FPS bliss. You see, when I met up with Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli, bombshells seemed to drop at the rate of one a minute – but in among the manifold jaw-drops (zero-g combat? WTF?), the fundamentals were laid out loud and proud: take the goodness of *Far Cry*, remove the broken bits and fill in the gaps with gaming Polyfilla extracted from the loins of the very gods.

So what was wrong with *Far Cry*? Crytek name and shame the quicksave system, the high difficulty levels, the iffy multiplayer code, the 'outgun rather than outsmart' Trigen's and the dud storyline. Rather harsh self-criticism, and in the eyes of a correspondent who adored the Carver quicksave challenge, rather a worrying one.

To me, the very essence of *Far Cry* was in its difficulty – in the way you'd lie upon a cliff, scan the valley below and plan your high-impossible assault. I loved the challenge. I even quite liked the Trigen's. Are they taking away that indescribable *Far Cry* feeling? That sense of tactical

power you got while standing on a green hill far away, beyond a Mercenary fort? Apparently not.

FAR AND AWAY

"In *Far Cry*, it was what we call 'outsmart gameplay', or as the Romans used to say, 'veni vidi vici'," explains Yerli. "It was about seeing something and then working out the best way to conquer it. That was very much *Far Cry*'s basic core gameplay and now we're improving and amplifying it with the hero, the weapon and the ammunition in *Crysis*. The more you observe, the better you can develop your skill and tactics because you get more from the situation. If you rush into it, you'll most likely fail – but if you're really careful about it, you can get a much richer gameplay experience and, by the huge amount of choice you have, you can play it again and again."

Talking to Crytek is always fun, you see – every time you get shown their game, ten or twelve nuggets of previously undisclosed shooter wonderment fall out of their beautiful volumetric mouths.

"We believe that you can play *Crysis* three or four times and still have a unique experience. In *Far Cry*, you could play through about two times and you got some replay value there," continues Yerli. "In *Far*

Cry, you could die and replay again and the scene would be almost unique, but in *Crysis* each scene is going to be inherently unique. Each mission is going to be kind-of unique depending on your choices, but each game experience is also going to be up to three to four times as unique, because of the anomalies and consequences, because of the tactical choices." And that's a whole lot of unique.

Example needed? Well, I'll give you two: one rooted deep in the gameplay and the other in the story. First off: your three ammunition types. The first brand does as you'd expect – pierces flesh, breaks bone and brings about bloody death. The second isn't far removed – incendiary ammo bursting into flames on contact and being rather more of a bloody and/or metallic chunk generator than an oh-so-subtle mode of jungle sniping. The third? Well, the third is where it gets interesting.

TIME DELAY

Snipe a sentry with *Crysis*'s new brand of 'tactical' ammunition and you'll be able to track them on your map – much as the old *Far Cry* binocs were once wont to do. If you're feeling fanciful, you could even tag a parrot and watch him flap around the island. These motion-tracking bullets,

THE STORY SO FAR...
CRYTEK



IT BEGINS

Cevat, Avni and Faruk Yerli set up Crytek on the strength of a tech demo with dinosaurs.

1999

ENTER JACK

Far Cry is released, Carver proves a hit and everyone does backflips in celebration.

2004



JUMP SHIP

Crytek have a cuddle with EA that turns into a long embrace and the love burns bright.

2005

NEW DIGS

Crytek move from Coburg to a Frankfurt HQ, where *Crysis* plotting continues apace.

2006

What happens if a bush explodes in the jungle, but no-one is there to hear it?

You can almost smell the Um Bongo.

Jake's giant pencil collection just grows and grows.



however, also come with trigger-controlled explosive and chloroformic qualities.

Fire your tactical ammo at a passing Korean grunt and you'll see your prey swat the back of his head as if he's been zapped by a mosquito. Then, as your chosen victim saunters towards a group of his pals intent on discussing the latest episode of whatever they watch in North Korea (*Happy Propaganda Sing Sing* or something) – you'll be able to either ignite the air around the back of his head and watch ragdolls fly, or simply release knock-out gas and watch the group simultaneously collapse. Think that's all joy? Well, think of the fun





It's a lot like *Heart Of Darkness*.
If you're literary-minded.

Tonight, hell freezes over!

Allow me to break the ice. My name's Mr Freeze-gun...



As well as being an opportunity for a games journalist to over-use Schwarzenegger quotes from *Batman & Robin* ("You're not sending ME to the COOLER!"), the ice guns of *Crysis* could well prove to be the greatest armaments since *Duke Nukem 3D*.

"One thing we have is an icicle gun, which is based on the alien technology," explains Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli. "Essentially, it takes water and humidity from the air, freezes it and shoots it out as ice particles, which means you're never short of ammunition. Another one is the freeze gun, which you can pick up off the aliens. It's really fun – you can freeze someone and then shatter them. You can give those aliens some real payback after they've used it against you." I can just see it now: "Ice to see you!"; "In this universe, there's only one absolute... Everything freezes!" etc etc. Repeat to fade...

and games you'll have if you nab a chopper pilot on the back of the neck before take-off: in-air hi-jinks and choppers falling out of the sky are a dead cert.

Alternatively, of course, if you're not one for stealth, you could just fire the trigger-charge onto the helicopter rotor and set off the explosive charge after take-off. Or you could use that same tactical ammo as a sound beacon to distract the pilot as he races towards his chopper, lure him into the jungle and then subtly shoot him in the back of the head. It doesn't necessarily have to be spectacular – but each and every way but loose, it'll be fun.

PREPARE TO DIE

The more storyline-orientated branch of in-game choice and variety, meanwhile, crops up when we come to the way that the story works – since *Crysis* isn't going to pussyfoot around the concept of in-game death. There won't be any *Oblivion*-style

'Tendrathill is conveniently unconscious' messages, nor will there be a *COD2* bulletproof Scotsman – when members of your squad snuff it, then they're out for good. Keep them alive and the future remains open – along with added protection there may be plot revelations or different avenues to explore; let them die and your future will be subtly altered.

This tactic plays throughout the fabric of the game – the loss of a comrade may well play with the storytelling of your current playthrough, but you'll also be led into decision-required dilemmas – such as that in which you're forced to choose between saving either a squadmate or a journalist (rather a *Batman Forever* situation in which the latter is presumably both sexy and a wearer of spectacles).

ALL CHANGE

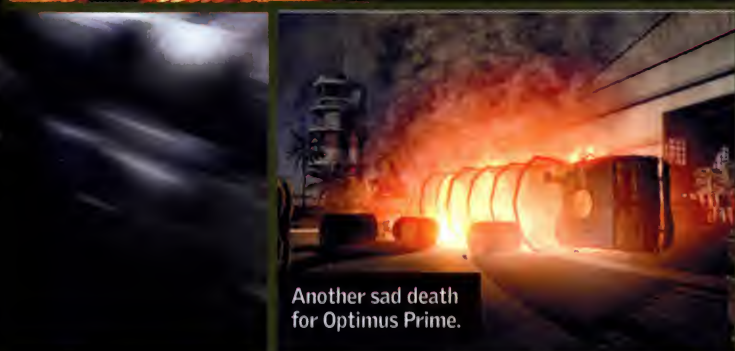
In fact, the whole structure of the game embraces this vampiric thirst for continual change and variety. They say that everything changes but you (well, Take That did), but in *Crysis* you'll even be able to play with your magic combat suit and adjust it for speed, defence and strength settings. Even the look, texture and feel of the game's missions warp and bend as you play through.

It takes a brave developer to piss around with a winning formula in-game (and I know you can't see me right now, but





This chap is the Hunter. He's mean.



Another sad death for Optimus Prime.

I'm waving a large placard with the word 'Xen' emblazoned on it – and Steve Hogarty is wearing giant *Gladiators*-style foam hands and pointing at it), but Crytek are dead-set on doing it once every three hours. Semi-spoilers follow – if you want to remain pure, then skip past.

MAJOR SPOILERS START

You begin in familiar territory: jungle. You hide in the long grass, you shoot branches and watch them collapse onto patrolling enemies. Before long, the cheeky terraforming antics of the Aliens becomes apparent – tropical moves to subterranean moves to temperate moves to arctic. Everything turns into something like an inside-out Center Parcs dome with the warm bit on the outside and the cold bit in the middle, and with all the waterslides completely frozen up.

The gameplay starts to revolve around freezing, shattering and intense combat against the mechanised variations of the Alien threat. After this: a sortie on the alien ship involving helicopter combat through the volumetric cumulo nimbi and zero-g floaty combat against the Aliens in their birthday suits rather than their former robotic forms. And all the while between missions, you'll be returning to homeworld – the USS Ashcroft – from which you'll be receiving briefings, before taking to the

skies and throwing yourself out of the backs of planes and into mission-entry parachute drops into paradise.

However, even your home isn't sacrosanct – Crytek intend to build up the Ashcroft Aircraft Carrier as a basecamp and safe haven, before cruelly ripping it away from under your feet two-thirds of the way through the game. It's a clever trick (used to great effect in *Freedom Fighters* as well, which no-one apart from me ever seems to have played), but when you see it in action like I did (with the added bonus of Crytek's Yerli grinning like a loon in front of me), then wow. Just wow.

From the start of the level (powering up your suit to lift a girder from a dying commander) to the close (watching a terrifying spider mech clamber onto the side of ship and witnessing it casually pick up a plane and lob it at the command tower), it's a pyrotechnic tour-de-force.

On-screen, Jake Dunn has been frozen by the spider-bot's freeze ray, and a nearby mouse is jiggling furiously to break him free, but Yerli is explaining the intricacies of what Crytek know as the 'Hunter'.

"It has sensors, so it can hear, see and recognise the biggest threat. It will try to freeze you, shatter you, grab you and throw you around," he grins. "It tries to pin you with its legs – it's very, very intelligent for an AI." And so it is, but after a while not

Power to the people

Crytek unveil their super-secret Power Struggle multiplayer mode...




Far Cry multiplayer wasn't too bad, but was without doubt a snipe-haven that (conversely) was also a little unfair on the I33t and a little easy on the noobs due to some dodgy Net code. *Crysis*'s Power Struggle mode is therefore fundamentally aimed at the hardcore.

"It's based around a US force and revolves around alien artefacts and technology," states Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli, while describing a relatively *Enemy Territory*-esque shebang. "Depending on what you find and what you capture, it unlocks new possibilities in the gameplay. By design, it's as hardcore a mode as you can get in a multiplayer game. It's very evolutionary and deep for the hardcore gamers to offer the most tactical possibilities for them. We want to see the battles going on forever – it's designed so that there's always a hotspot evolving, with new things to unlock to change the balance."

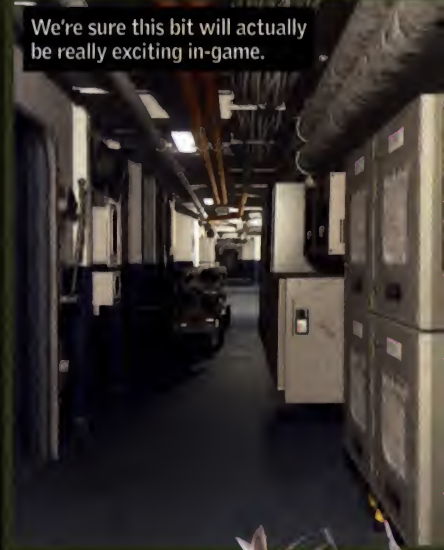
Every single minute of *Crysis* is being filled with three to four times the intensity of Jack Carver's outing

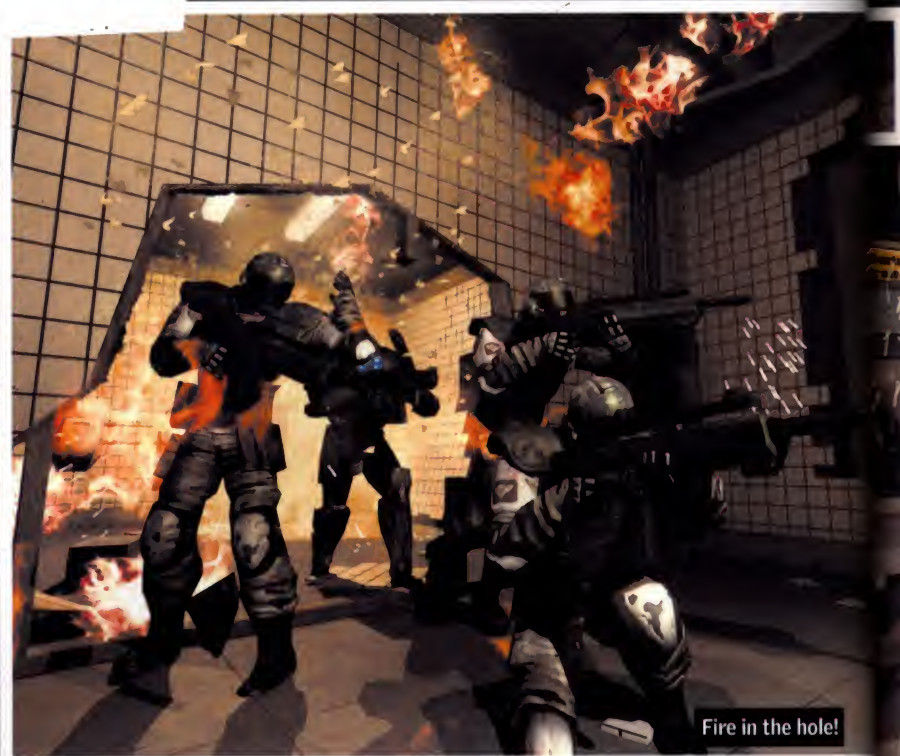
quite clever enough to avoid death by rocket launcher. "Later on, you'll meet maybe four, five or even six of these Hunters," grins Yerli. "But you'll be better equipped, you'll have skill-based moves against it. For example, you'll be able to jump on its head and take it down from up there. But from the off, you're not as good and you don't know how to do that."

MAJOR SPOILERS END

And so we approach the end of our brief sojourn in holiday hell – a guaranteed 12 hours of ingenuity that'll come at you from different angles every time you play it. With the happy boys at Crytek promising that every single minute is being filled with three to four times the intensity of Jack Carver's outing (and that's a scientific fact), we've got every reason to stoke the whirring cogs of the hype machine on this one. Jake Dunn: soldier, hero, bon-vivante and potential new prince of the single-player FPS. If, however, the final line of our review says something like, "The boy Dunn good!", you have our express permission to hunt us down and kill us like dogs. 

We're sure this bit will actually be really exciting in-game.





GET TO THE...

F.E.A.R. EXTRACTION POINT

Martin Korda is stuck in a helicopter with a mental naked psychic woman. His wife will be informed shortly

DEVELOPER: TimeGate Studios PUBLISHER: VU Games WEBSITE: www.timegate.com

THE LOWDOWN

- This time, the hunter becomes the hunted ✓
- Loads more emphasis on physics ✓
- All-new meaty enemies and weapons ✓
- Not developed by Monolith ✗
- Reluctance to release too much info about the game... Are they hiding something? ✗

NEVER CAN THERE have been so much fear surrounding an expansion pack and I haven't even seen it running yet. Ushered into a darkened San Francisco hotel room with a PC set up in one corner, I'm ordered to turn over all recording instruments (I don't have my guitar with me so I have to hand over my dictaphone instead), lest I gather too much information during this early demonstration of *F.E.A.R.*'s first expansion pack, *Extraction Point*.

Armed with just a pen, a pad, my eyeballs and my wits, I sit down by the PC breathless with anticipation, hoping to see more of the searing action that made the original such a phenomenal experience. This time, thankfully, I'm not to be denied.

THE NEXT LEVEL

Extraction Point is set in the immediate aftermath of *F.E.A.R.*'s shocking climax. Your chopper crashes to the ground. Your eyelids flick open. You're completely alone. So begins the next chapter of one of the most terrifying shooters ever made. This time, however, it's not those masters of the macabre Monolith who are heading up the

project, but rather a little-known, yet highly proficient development team called TimeGate Studios – developers of *Axis & Allies* and the *Kohan* games. And from the looks of it, they've picked up right where Monolith left off.

Extraction Point's premise is simple. In *F.E.A.R.* you were the hunter. This time, the roles are reversed. And while no-one will confirm my suspicions, it doesn't take a genius to work out that getting to an extraction point before your brains are slurped out of your skull will play some kind of role in the proceedings. After all, it's a tried and tested formula and, if executed properly, practically guarantees hours of tense, adrenalin-sapping gameplay.

Rather than simply replicating the fear factor of the original, it seems that TimeGate have set themselves a far loftier goal in expanding this already rich franchise. As well as shifting the balance of power even further to the dark side, the team is also embarking on a mission to make your surroundings far more interactive. The key component here is physics, and during a brief demonstration of a firefight in a typically

low-lit office, I'm more than a little impressed with what I see.

Armed with a mammoth chain-gun – an all-new weapon – I watch as my guide battles it out with a giant mechanical walker that spits out rockets. If you thought the level of destruction you could wreak in the original was impressive, then you're in for a treat here. Glass, concrete, wood, paint and office equipment are pulverised by missiles and barrages from the chain-gun, while hanging signs and lights are shot off the roof and come tumbling down on the mechanised walker, causing it to stagger under the weight of the makeshift projectiles.

Although it's far too early to make direct comparisons to *Half-Life 2's* physics-filled levels, there's just about enough on show here to make me believe that *Extraction Point* could be a contender if it maintains this level of detail throughout.

THE SCENT OF BLOOD

Next, my guide takes me into a room caked in blood and strewn with office equipment. Suddenly, two red eyes pierce the gloom, signifying the arrival of a brand new enemy



THE STORY SO FAR...

TIMEGATE STUDIOS



THE GATE OPENS
TimeGate release
RTS *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns*. We didn't like it all that much.



STANDALONE
Kohan: Ahrihan's Gift, a much-improved expansion, shows what the team is capable of.



RETURN OF THE KING
Kohan II: Kings Of War is a solid but unspectacular sequel to the now cult original.



AXIS & ALLIES
The team release this entertaining WWII RTS, based on the boardgame.

2001

2002

2004

2004

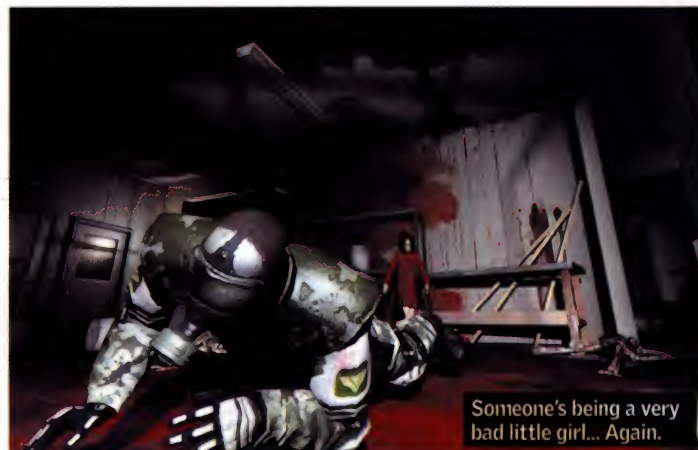


Get ready to wreak carnage with the new chain-gun.



I suspect there might be someone injured nearby...

SHE'S BACK! And you thought you'd seen the last of Alma



Someone's being a very bad little girl... Again.

One thing that hasn't changed since the original is the way that the storyline is presented. Just like *F.E.A.R.*, all is not as it seems, with the plot unfolding through a collection of sudden horrific visions and momentary sightings of hideous creatures. And yes, you've guessed it, Alma (everyone's favourite ghoul) reprises her childlike manifestation after having shocked us all with her true persona at the end of the original game. Again, it's hard to tell from such a brief demonstration whether *Extraction Point* will be as worrisome as *F.E.A.R.*, but if these early indications are anything to go by, we could be in for another fright-fest with plenty of plot twists along the way.

called a Shadow Creature, a foe that's practically invisible to the naked eye.

However, in a cunning twist (and, I suspect, the reason behind its moniker), this new foe can only be tracked by its shadow, which dances around the walls, betraying its true self's whereabouts. After a brutal firefight and with further proof of the game's enhanced physics system – said strewn office equipment quickly becomes pieces of strewn office equipment – the Shadow Creature is no more and the demonstration comes to a close.

Brief though it was and with the majority of my questions rebuffed, it's still difficult to not be impressed with *Extraction Point*. With most FPS expansion packs usually a weaker, watered-down version of the original, it's encouraging to see that TimeGate are really trying to do something new here, and so far, it's looking like it could be on course. And if the rest of it is as impressive as this, then it's little wonder there was so much concern about giving away too much, too soon (though admittedly, the opposite could also be true). Which reminds me, can I have my dictaphone back now please?



THE PROFESSIONALS

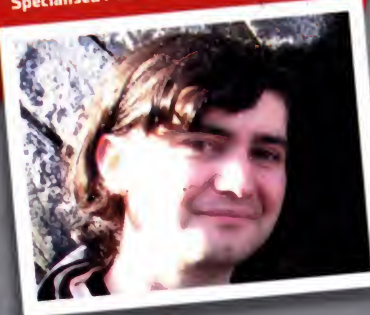
Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

AFTER LAST MONTH'S freakishly disturbing exposé about genetics in games, and the previous month's shocking investigation into healing methods in games, we were beginning to feel a little disillusioned with life in general. What is truth? Where do the lies end? The tablecloth of deceit

has been swept from beneath the water jug of belief, and it's wobbling dangerously over the fine varnished oak table of truth. This month however, we think we've almost nailed it. Could medieval weaponry be PC gaming's forte? We cornered a history graduate and forced him to tell us...

**THIS MONTH:
MEDIEVAL
WEAPONRY**

Expert: John Jackson
Job: History graduate
Specialised Pedantry: Medieval weaponry



THIEF 3

"A bow is a smart weapon for a thief who wants to fend off well-armed soldiers, and saw actual historical use among rural thieves. The sight on the side is a bit odd though, and the

arrowhead is too wide for killing men – the head only has to open a wound as wide as the shaft to inflict a deep injury, and wide arrowheads are easily stopped by armour. While flaming arrows were used to start fires, explosive heads were not used in the medieval west – and 'water-bombing' torches with arrows is somewhat unlikely."

PCZONE

★★★★☆

The basics are right



FABLE

"The sword shown here is far too broad and bulky to be wielded easily. Medieval weapons of similar length were little more than half that width. Some of *Fable's* weapons also exhibit

magical properties. Magical fire was naturally rare, but belief in magic was widespread in medieval times. Magic weapons did appear in romances, with Excalibur being merely the most famous example. Naturally, Christian knights tended to want religiously acceptable supernatural aid. The medieval epic 'Song Of Roland' describes a sword named Durendal, which had a small collection of saint's relics built into the pommel."

PCZONE

★★★★☆

Too bulky! Won't work



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

"The fantasy genre is given to exaggerating the decorative element of medieval weaponry, but in this case the decoration doesn't interfere with function – it'd be expensive, but it's perfectly reasonable for a rich man's sword. The length isn't unrealistic either – once better armour made the shield less vital, two-handed long-swords became the norm. My only criticism is her hands – all that plate and no leather gloves? Could be a painful mistake..."

PCZONE

★★★★☆

Put some gloves on love



MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

"Given its scale and size, this game is incredibly accurate and well considered. The battle system gives a fine degree of realism, and the strategic map, while understating the difficulty of maintaining large field armies, does take account of it in costs. The Risk-style 'take over the map' goal is a tad unfair when no-one actually did it in medieval times, but the 'glorious deeds' version is fantastic. The number of year-based events is impressive too."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Almost perfect!



BLACK & WHITE 2

"The rocks launched by siege engines would be much smaller relative to the machine – the machines shown couldn't possibly hurl them. Naturally, no-one would bother to shoot arrows at a stone wall. Most games underestimate the time it took to reload a siege engine too – bombardment was often a matter of days, not minutes. *Black & White 2's* ability to use both people and cows as missiles in sieges is accurate however. Prisoners would be launched (fatally) into the besieged fortification to demoralise the defenders, and rotten cattle corpses were splattered within the walls to cause disease."

PCZONE

★★★★☆

Catapults not quite right

WINNERS: Medieval: Total War

We're quite pleased with this month's efforts, well done all. Hardly a surprise that a game called *Medieval: Total War* won though, is it? Clue's in the name.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally-retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

*Spaceships *Barrels *Crates *Locksmithery *Burglary *Psychological Manias

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.



AGE OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES

Heroes Of Annihilated Empires takes a deep breath and prepares to break the lore

www.heroesofae.com | ETA: September

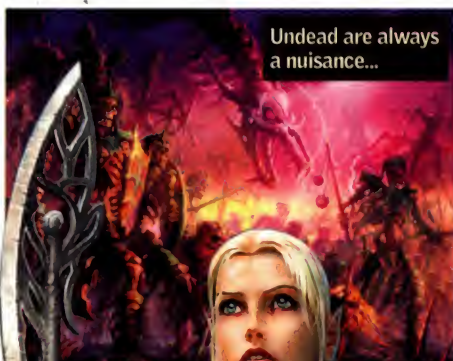
EVERYONE IS TRYING something new with the fantasy RTS these days – a simple Tolkien rip, it seems, is no longer enough. *Rise Of Legends* has introduced the bizarre and *SpellForce 2* has crowbarred in RPG elements, but *Heroes Of Annihilated Empires* looks set to perform both these tricks simultaneously. Essentially, your titular hero will level up RPG-style – but alongside it there'll be thousands of on-screen units, *Magic: The Gathering*-esque playing cards, top-down side quests, dungeons, vampire units and some entirely *Lost*-style story-telling that'll position massive question marks within the game that won't be answered until the third game in the series.

It all takes place on Earth in the distant past – before a group of science-obsessed killjoys had wiped magic and magical beings out of the history books. Dealing with the epic conflict 'twixt elf and undead, *Annihilated Empires* aims to seamlessly balance the wanderings of your RPG hero (gaining XP, saving ents from goblin attacks, dealing with ne'er-do-wells bothering a nearby magic shop, discovering breathtaking elemental spells in lonely chests – that kind of thing) with the decision to leave your heroic chap in stasis for half an hour while you build an army of thousands around him.

With each unit (goliath dragons and all) controllable by your own fair hand should you so choose, and spells that can see

massive chunks of land fall from beneath the feet of incoming undead death cannons – the visuals may be somewhat dimmed by the necessity of a sky-high 3D camera, but this could be something quite special.

As for when you come across a tank trundling through the fantasy wilderness, or when you find the wreckage of a fighter jet next to a group of confused halflings – well, it does get intriguing...



The action is teeny-tiny, but on a massive scale.



The human race's inevitable ascent into a state where entire lives are fed by broadband and brains are seamlessly melded with technology has come one step closer with the world's first online funeral massacre happyslap. The real world death of a much-loved female *World Of Warcraft* PvP-er through a stroke prompted a sombre ceremony on the banks of a lake in Winterspring in Kalimdor, with fellow guild mourners queuing over the surrounding virtual hillocks, waiting for their turn to give thanks for the life of their fallen friend – who was said to like the area because of the snow, the fish and the sound of running water. Evil Horde Guild Serenity Now (led by a chap called Azshira, who's a prick), however, had picked this faintly bizarre service as a perfect time for a surprise PvP attack – and as a perfect moral violation to make them famous the virtual world over when the intricately made video of the bloodbath hit Google video. "Congratulations (sic) you have stooped lower than any other guild in MMO history," said the Internet. "You're the biggest douchebags on Illidan," said another bit of the Internet. "I hope Azchira's (sic) dad dies of a heart attack, then at the funeral some guy runs in naked and pushes the coffin over and runs around slapping people screaming LOL OWNED, then releases a video of it," it added, as it slowly ground civilisation as we know it into dust.

Meanwhile, scandalous and lonely mothers in Korea are putting in some heavy grinding at home while their offspring are at school. In British schoolyards, you're no-one unless you've got a Yu-Gi-Oh Beyblade Top Trump or have seen Sally Seasby from 4C's rude bits – but in the Orient, if you're not playing cutesy, adorable and shite MMO platformer *Maple Story* at a high level, you're officially a Billy-no-mates. Korean mothers are therefore playing *Maple Story* throughout the school day to improve the popularity of their kids. With such bizarre online habits, it comes as no surprise to hear that Korea has produced the first playground of children able to be simultaneously picked last for games.

"I hope Azchira's dad dies of a heart attack, then at the funeral some guy runs in naked and pushes the coffin over"

"Hello, I'm the new janitor. Have you seen a foetid heap of bio-matter?"

SPIRIT IN THE SKY...

PREY

Jon Blyth gets spun, shrunk, shot, slimy and spattered. In space

DEVELOPER Human Head Studios PUBLISHER 3D Realms/2K Games WEBSITE www.prey.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 164

THE LOWDOWN

Mind-tickling portals and gravity what-not



Alarmingly organic environments



Establishes 'organic' as a striking new euphemism for 'anus-packed'



Lah-di-dah English woman referring to you as an insect



Not great if you've got a hangover



WHEN YOU'RE BEING abducted in-game, and *(Don't Fear) The Reaper* comes on the jukebox, it's a special moment. Especially considering that it wasn't on the bar's jukebox before the spaceship actually arrived. This can only lead to one conclusion: the last stage of preparation before the aliens' tractor beams are engaged, is to upload the Blue Oyster Cult to the abduction target's MP3 jukebox. That's why these aliens command respect – they're so much cooler than those aliens that post you a C90 of Prefab Sprout with a note to put it on at 'around half three please'.

Prey is increasingly anticipated as 'the game where you're a native American with a ghost bird who gets stolen by a giant space anus where he walks up the walls and that'. The longer version runs that you play as Tommy, a discontented mechanic at an Indian reservation casino. He's distanced from his culture and tormented by his unspoken love of Jenny, the soon-to-be-screaming barmaid. Early in the game, a vision of your recently mangled grandfather will force you to accept your heritage, and thereafter you're joined by

Talon, your spirit guide, who'll fly around offering clues, translating the alien language and distracting the creatures of the spaceship.

WALL-MOUNTED ARSES

'Spaceship' isn't quite the right word. It's actually a mini-Dyson Sphere, with its own rules of physics. Bluntly, it looks like MC Escher and William Burroughs took it in turns to pleasure a gigantic, hovering space womb. It's not just the wall-mounted arses, which regularly cough out a life-damaging brown spray and occasionally break through the floor like a visceral Oscar the Grouch. It's the foul, pulsating shininess of everything that lets you know you're fighting your way around a living, unhygienic intestine, populated by creatures designed to protect it (the Fodder, Hunters), work on it (the mechanically altered humans), and feed it (probably you).

It's not just people that are stolen in the abduction process – locations are, too. You'll soon stumble across your own bar, flipped over and stuck to a wall, and riddled with monsters and portals. And

in a small but pleasing touch, space seems to have a generous effect on the Poker machine.

In fact, 'walking up walls and that' isn't even approaching the half of it. The flexibility of the gravity means you need to be aware of attacks from the walls and ceiling, and you need to change gravity by aiming at switches to reach some rooms and portals. And the portals... They're everywhere, and come from nowhere. Shimmering rings (steady on) appear, dropping monsters in your path. A crate tumbles toward you, revealing a room inside the box from which a Fodder comes bulleting at you. Your brain will tilt uncomfortably as you try to figure out the implications of walking towards a box portal, only to see yourself disappearing into yet another box portal.

PRIVATE DANCER

You'll discover a small rock in a glass case, and seconds later realise you're on the rock, being observed by a creature where YOU JUST WERE. The only cover you've got from the things he sends down to kill you is the horizon. If this constant barrage doesn't have you paddling your feet on the

ETA
July

THE STORY SO FAR...

HUMAN HEAD



Legend Of Coffin Rock

An average treatment of the second episode of the *Blair Witch* trilogy amazes no-one.

2000

Rune At The Top

Enjoyably standard hack/slash action. A tribute called *Rune Man* is in the *Prey* casino.

2000



Dead Man's Hand

The boys get the last traces of mediocrity out of their system, ready for their biggie.

2004



Prey Away

Human Head poised to chuck out something wonderful and make a world go: "Oo. Ew. Oo."

2006

Biology Lesson

Prey's Dyson Sphere is a living, breathing, oozing organism...



Yes, that door is meant to look very, very rude.

The first thing you notice when you get dropped into action in *Prey*, is the neck-pinching sense of biology that gloopily surrounds you. The first weapon you get on the spacecraft makes a hypnotic beckoning motion with a set of side-mounted webbed claws. What's more, the secondary fire – a scope attachment – is a meat-walled tunnel that lunges for your eye when needed. We've already mentioned Escher and Burroughs – add *Kronenberg* and *Geiger* into the glistening, pulsating mix and you're getting close. Your three available reactions? One, horror. Two, nausea. And then there's the correct reaction – bouncing slightly on your seat in a self-made puddle of thrills.

floor in a stupid private dance, then you need a new central nervous system, because yours is broken. All this isn't even mentioning the mystery of the posh English voice that narrates your progress with an ever more concerned sneer, or the what-the-hell of the glowing child who becomes possessed and slides her young companion's chest gently around a massive steel pole like a piece of delicious kofte. For anyone who's ever had to sit next to a screaming child in a restaurant, it's a true pleasure to watch.

It would feel negligent not to mention a single potential bad point. The death scenes, where you have a limited time to shoot restless souls in an astral plane to recover health and spirit, doesn't really help the flow of gameplay, giving instead a feeling of interrupted immortality. But it doesn't affect the grim, filthy beauty of the game. In this jaded, thrill-numbed life, it's always a pleasure to have something about which you can wax happy. And with any luck, *Prey* will come through with its promise to electrify our hairy knockers next month when we generously ladle an exclusive review and demo upon you. **PCZ**



Ghost Chicken? Beef & Canyon? I give up.



A new crisp flavour: Spirit Plain.



You're frozen, when your heart's not open. Also when I kill you.



"No, you go first."

July 06

PCZONE



HUXLEY

DEVELOPER: Webzen PUBLISHER: Webzen
WEBSITE: www.webzengames.com ETA: 2006

FOREVER THE DARK horse of the gaming industry, the hour of *Huxley* has now finally come around. A persistent world of first-person shooting, NPC bug-battering, scintillating PvP and gorgeous Unreal Engine 3 visuals, *Huxley* is set to take the precedent set by *PlanetSide* and blow it squarely into the hearts of the many. It's apparently based on the novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (see what they did there?), but the only connections we can see ourselves are a) that it's set in the future b) it's not all happy, happy, joy, joy and c) that most female player avatars have their boobs hanging right out and are probably quite broadminded in a sex way. We know our literature.

2

The Bigger Picture

1 BRAVE NEW WORLD

The set-up is that some weird space stuff has collided with our moon, causing lunar catastrophe to tumble. There's mutants everywhere, two competing strands of warped humanity and a strange new energy source called Lunarites to squabble over.

2 SASSY SAPIENS

The Sapiens are the less genetically muddled of the two opposing factions of *Huxley* – themselves split between two races known as the One and the Syn. As you can see here, they think they're a bit too cool for school – and have big guns to prove it.

3 ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

The Alternatives, constituting of the blank-eyed Alternix and the steely-jawed Alteravers, are slightly irradiated by the whole global catastrophe shebang. They like to listen to angry music, drink snakebite-and-black and shoot Sapiens.

4 SUMMER IN THE CITY

The two tribes live in rival Mega City 1 style abodes: the Sapiens in Nostalonian and the Alternatives in Eska. Here, you'll even get your own apartment, where you'll be able to store weapons, armour and chintzy glass ornaments.

5 NICE WHEELS

Higher-level characters can drive vehicles around town and feel smug about themselves; noobs have to use public transport and clean windows at traffic lights. Fighting craft will include dropships, tanks, hoverbikes and APCs.

6 LICENCE TO THRILL

As you meander up through the levels, you'll gain access to new weapons and vehicles much in the way you did in *PlanetSide*: gaining a licence, running gleefully over to your new hoverplane and neatly colliding with a nearby wall after 30 seconds of not knowing the controls.

7 HYBRID THEORY

It's not all about the slaughter of player characters: NPCs known as Hybrids come in for a kicking as well in many and varied quests through the assorted wastelands of wrecked future-Earth. A few look a bit *Starship Trooper*-y.

8 THE CRUX OF HUX

Not much has been revealed about the PvP fight dynamics of *Huxley*, but expect large-scale, fast-paced action with more than a twinge of *UT* – albeit somewhat more tactical than its prestigious licence-mate. We'll have more next issue...

3

4

5

6

7

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UPFRONT **OI! WHAT'S YOUR GAME?**



ROPER!

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

*Will Porter bleats outside Bill Roper's house until he invites him in, makes him a cup of warm Ribena and talks **Hellgate: London***

Who are ya?



NAME Bill Roper
DEVELOPER Flagship
POSITION CEO
AGE 41



GAMES WORKED ON

BEFORE Nine years at Blizzard covering *Warcraft*, *StarCraft* and the *Diablo* series

FAVOURITE GAME Bill plays almost everything: PC, console, boardgames and cards. His all-time favourite game is poker – usually Texas Hold 'Em

Q First things first: will the characters of *Hellgate*: London all have real British accents?

A "Some will! But just like in London, there's a huge diversity of cultures. We have some British voice actors we've brought in to lend that air of authenticity, but there are also NPCs from numerous cultures and corners of the world. We've even tossed a few Yanks into the mix, but the predominant sound is British."

How's the drive for the randomly generated streets of London coming along? Why aren't you taking the expected linear approach?

"We've always been huge believers and advocates of randomly generated content – or, perhaps more accurately, dynamically generated. The massive amount of work and planning that goes into creating systems that can make level layouts, populate them with appropriate enemies and rewards, as well as chance events and do so in a fun and challenging fashion is almost minimised by the term 'random'. The results are random, but the path getting there is anything but."

"We think that random elements and dynamic generation provides the greatest amount of replayability possible. Every time you go out into the world, we create a specific instance for you (and your group if you're adventuring with friends) that will be different from the last time you played, even if it was in that same area of London."

What's your favourite *Hellgate* monster?

"From what we have in the game right now, it's a toss up between the Flesh Eaters and our first boss, Shulgoth. The Flesh Eaters are the first zombies

you meet, and as we all know, smacking zombies is good fun! We've also put a lot of time into them because they tend to be the test bed for a lot of things we then incorporate into the player character models, animations, clothing systems and so forth. Right now, they can have variations in outfits, attacks and they were the first demons in the game where you could blow off body parts. There's nothing creepier than being attacked by a headless, one-armed zombie.

"Shulgoth, meanwhile, is the first big baddie we put you up against, and is really the first introduction to players of an enemy with branching AI. He has different attacks for different situations, is aware of his own status (health, power and so on) and is a big nasty brawler to boot. He also has a frightening special room all of his own that really gives him a fantastic presence the first time you meet him."

What's been the most fun thing you've seen put into the game so far?

"Definitely multiplayer. The game instantly became five times as fun when we started forming groups. We've always been huge fans of the multiplayer experience – *Diablo* was the game that launched Battle.net, after all – and it suddenly opens up all kinds of new tactics and strategies. There are a lot of really fun weapons (over 100 base types), spells, monsters and areas to explore – but it definitely gets kicked up a huge notch when you can experience it with your friends."

You've gifted your voice to many of the games you've worked on such as *Diablo* and *Warcraft* – will you be appearing in *Hellgate*?

"Oh yes, although I have to audition just like any other voice talent. My favourite



Look, no hands! Just guns!

"There are lots of fun weapons, spells, monsters and areas, and it gets kicked up a notch when you play with friends in multiplayer"



Those keyring-lights keep getting brighter.



Closed for engineering my arse.

character I'm voicing is one of our Techsmiths named Bodger. This guy is someone that, given enough time, can fix just about anything. He has a particular genius in the fabrication and repair of technological devices without the benefit of having the proper parts. As Bodger would say, 'The secret to bein' a proper Techsmith is all in the tools. If it don't move and it should, use WD-40. If it moves and shouldn't, use Duct tape.'

We've heard on the grapevine you're a talented baritone. Do you flex your vocal chords often?

"I'm fortunate in that I can get down to a serviceable bass if I'm recording

in a studio and have microphones to help me. I'm also a tenor by experience, so singing almost anything is a lot of fun for me.

"I do try and sing as often as possible with my group, but since they're based in Southern California and I'm up in San Francisco, it isn't enough, by far. I've been thinking of attending an open mic jazz night here in San Francisco, since that was my first love vocally, but it all depends on how many hours we're pouring into *Hellgate* – and right now, that's a lot. I guess I'll just have to head over to our sound booth and do some more demon growls instead..." **PCZ**

BILL ROPER

Where he turns for inspiration...



MUSIC: Bill sings in a group called The Poxxy Boggards – they've just released a fifth album.



LUCAS: In Bill's collection of 800 DVDs, *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* stand out as true greats.



MARVEL: Bill was a big collector of Spider-Man and The Uncanny X-Men back in the '80s.



HIS WIFE: Smart, practical, beautiful and a gamer: "I count myself fortunate in all respects."



PCZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

- 1 **↑** **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 2 **NEW** **TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND**
Issue 168 81%
- 3 **↓** **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%
- 4 **NEW** **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006**
Issue 168 69%
- 5 **—** **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 6 **NEW** **FINAL FANTASY XI: TREASURES OF AHT URHGAN**
N/A
- 7 **↓** **LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%
- 8 **↓** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
Issue 152 95%
- 9 **↓** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006**
Issue 162 90%
- 10 **↓** **STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**
Issue 166 85%
- 11 **RE** **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 12 **NEW** **CSI: 3 DIMENSIONS OF MURDER**
Issue 169 62%
- 13 **NEW** **PIPPA FUNNELL: TAKE THE REINS**
Issue 169 19%
- 14 **↓** **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 15 **↓** **ROME: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION**
Issue 148 93%
- 16 **↑** **BATTLEFIELD 2**
Issue 157 94%
- 17 **RE** **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**
Issue 153 57%
- 18 **↓** **BLACK & WHITE 2**
Issue 161 93%
- 19 **↓** **THE GODFATHER**
Issue 167 57%
- 20 **↑** **GUILD WARS**
Issue 156 94%



1 THE SIMS 2: OFB

The best *Sims* expansion pack ever. Yes, we can admit when we've been surprised by a successful sim spawn from the EA overlords.



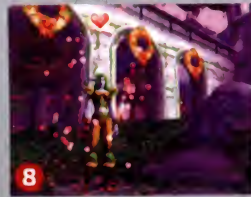
2 TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Hit! Lara is officially cool again! Still no confirmation on how the ancients kept the cogs of their traps in working order for millennia, though.



4 THE GODFATHER

Witness the inevitable backward crawl of a shoddy backwater production. As much fun as eating the bits of horses they put into glue.



8 WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The *WoW* behemoth continues to chug through Azeroth - with new weather effects that presumably shower Blizzard with paper money.



Naval-gazing at its finest.



Somewhere below the sea.



Midway's naval combat is slow but satisfying.

STUKKA IN THE MIDWAY WITH U-BOATS

Even though *Midway* doesn't actually feature German planes. Or boats. Sorry about that

www.eidos.co.uk | ETA: Summer

IT'S BEEN QUIET on the *Midway* front: all too quiet. What was once an interesting mixture of *Battlefield* (you fly the planes! you steer the boats!) and RTS (you tell the planes to go here! You tell the boats to go there!) went oddly silent this time last year. Developers Mithis were leaking money out of a hole in their office made by Hungarian tree-rats, and it took a snaffling of its staff and the formation of Eidos Hungary to continue development.

Good job they did though, as *Midway* is certainly a hefty original title - the device of putting top-down 'Dad's Army' title sequence'-style strategy alongside the ability to leap between the controls of your various planes, subs and gigantic warships worked really well in our hands-on over the Pacific. Defending a sunny isle from incoming

Jap Zeroes, torpedo boats and battleships was a simple matter of organising the takeoff of various air-machines and harbour release of various death-boats, pointing them in the direction of the enemy and then taking them over at relevant points of high action. Naval combat, though slow, honestly proved fairly rewarding as well - what with the satisfaction afforded by an accurately judged torpedo hit on an enemy vessel.

Midway won't win any awards for graphics, nor will its flight models and accuracy set the world alight, but it is a brave attempt at doing something different - potentially being the first success of its kind since that *Battlezone* remake of five or six years past. What's more, when you lose in multiplayer you'll be able to whine: "You sunk my battleship." Which can only be a good thing.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who's rewriting history

JÓZSEF MOCSÁRY – STORMREGION DESIGNER ON *RUSH FOR BERLIN*



If you set aside the hideous tragedy of genocide and all the millions of casualties, then World War II was the last time we had a war that everyone agreed was OK. So when *Rush For Berlin* lets you play the Germans as the good guys, French journalists get cross. Read on...



Don't forget you win a tankety-tank chequebook and pen...



Tanks: mischievous.

making discoveries and hindering the enemy's efforts, you can improve this score. Your overall score affects the timeline – whether the Germans will have had time to build the prototype Maus tank, or if the US Army reach the Reichstag first."

But it's all realistic...

"Yes, this isn't a science-fiction game. The Maus tank was in development, and the radio-controlled explosive mini-tanks were used. Everything was a real part of the war, but with the alternate timeline, you're not just playing through history."

Why do you think WWII games are more popular in Germany?

"You just can't make enough World War II games for Germany – for some reason, they love it. They love the tanks, everything. And there's obviously this perception that the Germans were the bad guys, which of course, they're aware of. Once you remove that, like we have in *Rush For Berlin*, they love it."

bonus missions where you play the French resistance, which is much more guerilla combat."

What about the alternate timeline?

"The time you take on a level affects your score – it's constantly going down. By

Germany aren't the bad guys?

"Yes, you can play as Germany and win the campaign. But you remember the assassination attempts on Hitler, with the bomb in a briefcase? In our game, one of these attempts is successful – he's shot while escaping from his bunker."

Nice touch. It's a canny trick, that. Get Hitler out of the way.

"The soldier who shoots Hitler in the cut-scene, you can see a tattoo on his neck – that's one of our developers. So after that, when you're playing as Germany, you're not playing as the Nazis – you're playing as ordinary Germans defending their country."

Does everyone like that?

"Well, some people don't like it when they have to play the Germans. Two weeks ago we were showing this game at an exhibition, and a French journalist said: "Every German was a Nazi." And she thought it was a really bad thing that you can play the Germans as the good guys. But not every German was a bad guy – it was German soldiers who tried to assassinate Hitler, after all."

So... tell me about *Rush For Berlin*.

"In *Rush For Berlin*, you are playing in the final year of World War II. The Western Allies and the Soviet Union are both pushing towards Berlin, and the Germans are forced to defend. You can play as any of these three teams, and there are

LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

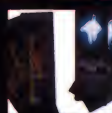
Because, quite frankly, we've got more duvet-sized black T-shirts than is socially acceptable

It's at this time of year that grunting sweaty men congregate in a big room in LA to shout at near-naked women – baying for free T-shirts and paraphernalia. This year, *ZONE* will be among these shouty smelly men – not because we've got something wrong with us (like they do), but because through the magic of eBay, we can turn tat into money – money that can help people down on their luck. Check out our tag PCZoners and you might just find the crap of your dreams...

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity, mate...
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org.uk



THIS MONTH'S TAT



EIGHT HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES BOOKMARKS
With Russian writing on



SUPREME COMMANDER T-SHIRT
Controversially black and in a medium size



ASUS BUSINESS CARD HOLDER
With Jamie Sefton's name on it



CHICAGO 1930 HIPFLASK
Amazing what you can find in a drawer

THE TAT BOARD

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	LMA MANAGER 2006 TINY FOOTBALL It's really small you know, probably smaller than you were expecting...	£1.20	4
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	EMPTY PINEAPPLE JUICE CARTON Ingrates, the lot of you. We work hard for you. Then you throw it back in our faces.	£0.01	1

THINK YOU'RE CLEVER?

A high level of attention is again being brought to the bots, that all-too-often ignored brand of AI smarts. Epic are promising that their little chaps will have more personality than before, and they'll respond to your queries and commands accordingly. Don't expect a written thesis from them though...



UT2007

DEVELOPER Epic Games **PUBLISHER** Midway

WEBSITE www.ut2007.com **ETA** Winter **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 165

THIS TIME LAST year, Epic told us that there would be giant insectoid vehicles in *UT2007*. This time this year, they've broken cover. Behold then, the Dark Walkers – Necris vehicles set to rain death upon Malcolm and chums that may be packing more firepower than a less than salubrious Nottingham estate, but are also a fairly obvious target for Redeemer fire. Also unveiled at E3 are hoverboards – non-Mattel endorsed techno-slidey-planks with an attachment that lets you couple up with passing vehicles and skid along behind them in the manner of Marty McFly. You won't be able to bear arms while doing so (and hoverboard lore suggests self-propulsion over water might cause problems), but you will look mighty cool.

BLUE SKY

Far Cry, Crysis, Oblivion, Doom (!): the best games always have the best skies. And on this simple, impartial basis, *UT2007* will be bloody brilliant. Look at the pretty clouds! If there was ever a sky under which it would be good to be fragged - then this is it.

"STRIDER!"

Or in *UT*-speak: Dark Walker! The most terrifying of alien craft has hit *UT* - providing the first player-controlled tripod death machine of all recorded time. If HG Wells and John Wyndham were still around, the royalties would just be rolling in...

MUST LEARN CONTROL

Rumour has it that tweaks in the school of *UT* movement will mean that the 'floaty' feel of *Unreal* past will be greatly reduced come 2007. Double-jumps and other such acrobatic rocket-dodging will remain, but will feel more clothed in the robes of accurate gravitational pull.



Well, it's cheaper than paying for porn in your hotel room...

SHANGHAI SURPRISE...

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

Exclusive! *Jamie Sefton* tracks down the world's most elusive agent in China – and all he brought back was a stupid T-shirt...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Shanghai PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE splintercell.uk.ubi.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 167

THE LOWDOWN

- Brave re-invention of the stealth series ✓
- Daytime, war and swimming missions! ✓
- Bots added to both single- and multiplayer ✓
- 'Directed scenes' add heart-wrenching moral choices ✓
- No co-op multiplayer missions available ✗

MY EARS HAVE just popped for the third time, as the sleek, art deco lift smoothly glides to a halt at the 87th floor of the Grand Hyatt, Shanghai – officially the world's tallest hotel. Stepping out into the Cloud 9 bar, I edge nervously towards the steel and glass viewing point and look down onto the *Blade Runner*-esque forest of neon toy-town skyscrapers. Suddenly, my stomach lurches 180-degrees as I actually feel the disconcerting sway of the building that Sam Fisher will soon rappel down.

Actually, the goggle-wearing Third Echelon agent will be clambering inside and outside a 1,380ft skyscraper that looks uncannily like the Jin Mao Tower, but isn't. Ubisoft and particularly the game's co-producer Julian Gerighty are wary of the comparison: "I just don't want to get sued," he laughs.

I'm here in the People's Republic of China for an exclusive look at the fourth *Splinter Cell* game *Double Agent*, which is currently being coded by a friendly cosmopolitan crew of over 130 people at Ubisoft's Shanghai studios. The number four is extremely unlucky in China (it sounds like the Cantonese word for death), but this doesn't concern the team working on the next important game in the series.

"*Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory* were critically-acclaimed games. The challenge was, 'OK we have enormous responsibility, but we have to make the new *Splinter Cell* super-interesting for us, then hopefully it'll be exciting for everybody else'," explains Gerighty. "If you don't renew, you'll go the way of *Tomb Raider*, where you do the same thing over seven or more games."

SHOCKED!

The developers cite *Resident Evil 4* as an inspiration of how to refresh a franchise, keep the hardcore fans and introduce a raft of new players. In this respect, *Double Agent* marks some shocking revelations for fans: Sam Fisher without his trademark goggles for much of the adventure; daylight maps; a new visibility bar replacement; swimming sequences; a radical *Halo/Call Of Duty*-style health system; no HUD. Whuh? Bjuhuh? Don't worry – as I discovered after finally prising my fingers away from the iron railings on the hair-raising 87th floor of the Grand Hyatt mega-hotel, *Double Agent* could be the Fisher king's best game yet.

Following the death of his daughter Sarah, our hero falls into a deep bout of

depression before accepting a mission from Lambert at the NSA to become an NOC (Non-Official Cover) agent – the highest form of espionage – in order to infiltrate a USA-based terrorist organisation known as John Brown's Army. Sam is planted in Ellsworth prison as a bank robber, with a secret mission to befriend JBA member Jamie Washington and break out of jail.

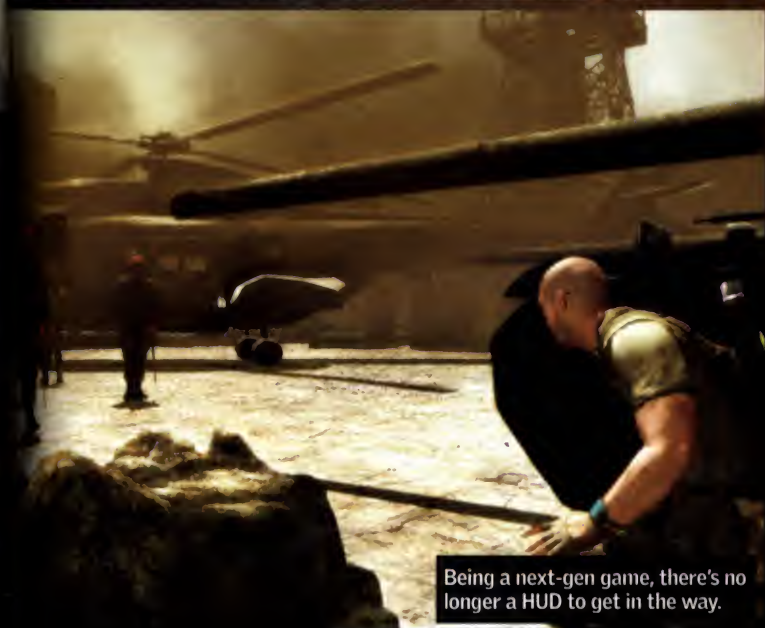
"We wanted to amplify the emotionally intensive experience, and so after discovering movies like *Infernal Affairs* (Hong Kong Triad-infiltration action movie) we made the *Double Agent* concept a central part of every design decision, with dual objectives for Sam in every mission," says Gerighty. "Not only will he have objectives from the terrorists, but he'll have objectives from the NSA. The tension comes from the impossible feat of satisfying both clients and from this one rule – do whatever you have to do, but don't blow your cover." This gives you real moral dilemmas – how far are you going to go to do good in the long term? Would you kill an innocent person if you knew it would save 3,000 people? What if it was your girlfriend?

These moments are heightened in what the team is calling 'directed scenes', which

ETA
Sept



Do you sacrifice the jail guards to earn the trust of the terrorist?



Being a next-gen game, there's no longer a HUD to get in the way.

still involve you playing the game, but present you with an agonising dual choice. It's a bit like choosing between a Hob Nob or a Jaffa Cake with your cup of tea.

SHOOT!

Sam's first major decision is when he makes it to the terrorist HQ, is given a gun by the leader Emile and ordered to shoot a bound and gagged prisoner to prove his loyalty. It's a terrifically disturbing moment as you aim the weapon at an innocent man while he stares straight at you, writhing in terror, his muffled screams piercing the silence.

"In previous versions of this scene, 99% of people would just shoot him," continues Gerighty, "but we wanted to make it more heart-wrenching for the gamer. We've worked incredibly hard on facial expressions with a traditional animator, along with the sound effects and voice-acting to make you really think twice." The trigger is squeezed, there's a loud gunshot and the bullet hits home. The dead man's body slumps silently against the grubby wall of the room.

All of your choices have consequences in the game, with thousands of lives in the balance and the fate of several major characters at



"We have to make the new *Splinter Cell* super-interesting for us, then hopefully it'll be exciting for everybody else..."

Julian Gerighty, co-producer, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*





New York and Cozumel, Mexico, are two of the other locations in *Double Agent*.



Sam Fisher does a 'Brokeback Mountain'...



Just don't look down...



"Oooh! All the people look like ants!"

China Crisis

Sam's vertigo-inducing encounter with the world's tallest hotel



All 88 floors of the tallest hotel in the world.

According to *The Observer*, the Grand Hyatt in Shanghai is one of the seven hotel wonders of the world. Stretching from the 53rd to the 87th floor of the 88-storey Jin Mao Tower, it's a beautiful and elegant skyscraper with incredible views of the whole Shanghai skyline.

In *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, Sam Fisher gets the opportunity to rappel not only down the outside of the building, but inside as well – the Hyatt has a stunning 33-storey atrium running through its core. Although, as we've made clear, the building in *Double Agent* coincidentally only happens to look exactly like the Grand Hyatt, right down to the style of rivets in the bar on the 87th floor.

Sam uses his stealth on the summit of the hotel, reaching up and pulling guards off the top, while climbing down and using his microphone to listen in on conversations. All around him, the Chinese New Year is happening with pyrotechnic displays erupting all over the city. "Down there is the tower that Tom Cruise rappels from in *Mission Impossible III*," says co-producer Julian Gerighty, pointing far below where Sam Fisher is hanging. "Up yours, Tom!"

stake – *Double Agent* promises at least three alternate endings, with the possibility of a few more. You'll keep coming back to the HQ 'hub', where you'll meet the five major terrorist characters.

"For me, the most interesting relationship Sam has in the game is with the love interest Enrica. She's an eco-terrorist and you can understand what she wants, but really disagree with the means. Nothing is black and white. Of course, at the end of the day you have to stop the terrorists for your job and your morals, but the different people in the organisation will make that a lot more complex."

INFILTRATE!

Next, we're shown the Iceland tutorial level which is more traditional *Splinter Cell* fare, as you have to infiltrate a base and stop the launching of a missile destined to bring down a passenger plane. Except you begin *Double Agent* thrown in at the deep end (literally) with a new swimming skill to play with, complete with oxygen-bubbling scuba gear. Also, you're joined by a young rookie, known as John Doe – you can tell he's the new boy because his mask

only has two goggles (god help the poor sod beneath him who only has one goggle). Doe is one of the game's new AI-controlled partners, who you work with co-operatively through the level, copying and learning his kill moves, using him to distract enemies and getting the odd leg-up into hard-to-access areas.

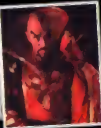
"You're below the ice flow, and can see guards above through holes in the ice," adds Gerighty. "By knocking on the ice you'll attract the guards to different areas, allowing you to pop up out of the water, grab them and slit their throats underwater. It's for the kids!" Other NPCs that help you out in the game include another NSA agent called Hisham, plus you also finally get to play with bots in the stonking new team-based multiplayer mode (see 'Hot Bots', page 48).

Next up is one of the daytime maps, set in Kinshasa, Africa, where a civil war is raging between military police and rebels. It's here, in the dusty and detritus-ridden backstreets that you can really see the vision of the new *Splinter Cell* – the level is the antithesis of the previous games. You're in very bright sunlight where you



In the beginning...
China, according to mythology, was formed by the creator of the universe, Pangu.

Ming the Merciless
The first Ming Emperor executed 40,000 people connected to a failed murder plot.



Revolution!
Leader Sun Yat-Sen led an uprising. Mao Tse-Tung later became chairman of the CCP.



Ubisoft Shanghai
The company now has over 500 employees here and has developed over 18 titles.



Way back when

15th century

1911

1996

Let off a shot and tempt the AI to come and look for you.



Perform mid-air tricks, until the parachute gets tangled.



"By knocking on the ice you attract guards, allowing you to pop out of the water and slit their throats"

Julian Gerighty, co-producer, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*



Animation is a mixture of motion capture and key-frame.



Luckily, Sam remembered where he'd parked the tank.

have to move fast, plus you're in constant danger and your cover is either being destroyed or created depending on the explosive situation. Sam has left his traditional gimp gear back in the sex dungeon and is instead clad in a khaki T-shirt and cool sunglasses, with a high-calibre rifle strapped to his back.

HIDE! SEEK!

But how the blimmin' heck are you supposed to perform stealth in this environment? "Before, gameplay was quite simple – you'd hide in the dark and avoid light. The feedback system was very simple, consisting of just whether you were hidden or not," explains senior designer CT Smith. "We've had to rethink the player's visual feedback for *Double Agent*, as you now have stealth in war, daytime, snowstorms, sandstorms and water, as well as having trust issues from your colleagues to cope with."

The new system is a simple light on Sam's back and front that gives you all the info you need. It's based on the universally-known traffic light system: green you're hidden, orange you can be seen and red

you're in combat. Another new element is that it shows what the AI is thinking, so flashing orange means the enemies are looking for you, whereas flashing red means they know where you are.

"This comes into effect in say, a snowstorm," says Smith. "Previously, you'd have no idea whether the guys over the hill could see you or not. Now, as long as it's green, you're OK. If it turns orange, the goons have seen something in the snow, so you can back away for a while. You can play with the AI in a way you've never done before."

Fans can be assured that *Splinter Cell* is still very much a stealth game, not a shooter, so if you move from cover to cover and don't get involved in the fighting, you'll be able to sink into the background. But if you start behaving recklessly and shoot at either side, Sam will be drawn into conflict and be seen as a threat by everyone. The new visual feedback system in *Splinter Cell* goes hand-in-hand with the new health system, which can be described crudely as a cross between *Halo* and *Call Of Duty 2*, with Sam wearing a futuristic impact suit

Good for the Stealth

Double Agent's new health system explained

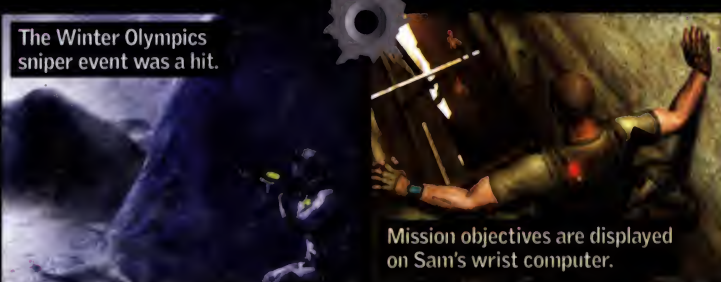
Bloody Parisian students!



If there's one thing that's going to prevent you experimenting with multiple pathways and different ways of moving through levels in a stealth game, it's a health system that relies on first-aid packs. *Double Agent's* senior designer CT Smith was determined to create a more forgiving system: "In the recent Winter Olympics, the USA and Canada had impact suits – material that hardens on impact. We took that idea a couple of generations ahead for military purposes to the point where it can stop a bullet. However, after a few hits, the suit can't cope, so you need to take a break for it to recover, which actually encourages stealth – because when in combat, the last thing you want to do is stand still!"

What this means for players, in a similar way to the systems in *Halo* or *Call Of Duty 2*, is that if you cock-up a situation of getting past a guard, you can go and recover for a while, then try again without feeling as if you're being punished. The new health system can also be adapted to different situations, so in jail, Sam is shot at with a non-lethal riot shotgun (that he can also pick up and use) – if he takes too many hits, he's knocked unconscious and wakes up in the prison infirmary. Smith says: "Combine this health system with the new moment-to-moment 'traffic light' feedback system on Sam showing what the AI is thinking, and the game is immediately much more fun."

The Winter Olympics sniper event was a hit.



Mission objectives are displayed on Sam's wrist computer.



The actual Oriental Pearl TV Tower...

Hot Bots

Splinter Cell's brand new multiplayer modes revealed!



Bots have been added to both single- and multiplayer games.

"Previously, the multiplayer was all based on skill – it was very hardcore," says senior producer Arnaud Carrette. "Now, we hold your hand for the first hour to show possibilities of the map, with 'ghosts' showing where you can move and what actions you can perform. Also, to help gamers get to grips with the environments and characters and start to compete, we've added bots. We wanted the AI to act realistically, to give you the feeling you're playing against real people. The bots can communicate between one another, make real-time strategies and tactics and will be able to kick your ass."

Multiplayer is now up to three-versus-three, with Upsilon forces (mercenaries) versus spies. However, the tricky part as a spy is not getting the objective or info, but extracting yourself safe and alive afterwards. The Upsilon force now has a powerful proximity radar, but like the movie *Aliens*, it shows the threat is near but not whether they're above, below, in front or behind you. The spies, meanwhile, can now hack systems using limited wi-fi, which adds a fascinating element of cat and mouse as you move around trying to avoid the attention of the mercs. Each player has three lives during the game, and for the spies, you can leave the hacking and return to the same place later if things get too hot – however, if you're shot and killed, you lose the entire file.

The multiplayer Team Hack level shown was the typical warehouse affair, but the tension was palpable between the members of the Ubisoft dev team as the spies attempted to steal away information from four computer terminals, while the mercs tracked them down. Disappointingly, there's none of the co-op multiplayer missions that were introduced in *Chaos Theory*, but the team have decided to focus on the AI bots to train up beginners offline so they can enjoy the full *Splinter Cell* experience with their friends online. Here's the full list of modes:

Team Hack: hack the other team's computer and protect yours.

Deathmatch: individual or team.

Blitz: alternate attack and defence and lead your team to victory.

Key Run: grab the only key on the map to hack high-security computers.

Sam vs AI: can one Sam Fisher defeat three Upsilon spies?

Countdown: the more you kill, the more you play...

NOT REAL!



...And the virtual Oriental Pearl. Uncanny, eh?

that hardens on impact from a bullet or other projectile, then reforms when he's hidden (see 'Good For The Stealth', p47).

The Kinshasa gameplay showed Sam picking off enemies in among the chaos of war, and as such, you don't have to worry about hiding bodies. "Being in control of a situation – hanging back and deciding to take someone out – that's key to the *Splinter Cell* experience," says Gerighty. A mini-mission then presented itself when some government soldiers rounded up a group of prisoners against a wall – do you risk blowing your cover to save half-a-dozen lives? If you decide not to intervene, you watch helplessly as the men are cruelly executed.

The levels are complex and present multiple paths for you to complete your objectives – in this particular demo, the rendezvous point for the mission to assassinate a mole in the terrorist organisation was reached by sliding under a truck and holding on Indiana Jones-style as the driver carried the unseen Sam through the bombed out, bloody streets.

Ubisoft are clearly striving to make the new *Splinter Cell* not just about Sam's latest moves and gadgets. Gerighty continues: "We're looking at lots of stuff in contextual situations, such as rappelling on the inside of the Shanghai hotel and swimming – different environments and how he adapts, rather than just another kind of split jump. Those moves and the popular knife play are still in the game, but we're just trying to be less feature-based – Look at Sam! He can do tantric moves and put his legs behind his head!" Saying that though, what are the new gizmos?

"There are two sets of gadgets and weapons. The NSA gear is very high-tech, cutting-edge. At one point we were thinking of doing nano-tech stuff, but it's very hard to do on-screen, so we're kind of pushing that idea aside," he adds. "On



Use enemies as handy human shields.


the other side, however, you've got the terrorist equipment, which is a little more primitive – not as subtle, but absolutely devastating. Our 'Double Agent' concept goes into everything in the game." The list isn't final yet, but one new addition is Sam's Wave Vision, that will allow him to see electromagnetic and sound waves.

LOOKS AMAZING!

As for the PC version, the mouse/keyboard control system should remain unchanged from *Chaos Theory*, as fans have told the team it's fine. Graphically, the team are looking to match the Xbox 360 version for the minimum spec, although this is expected to be quite high – 3GHz with shader-only 3D cards. However, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* will be compatible with the new AGEIA PhysX card, and the PC developers are implementing all kinds of subtle stuff that the 360 team don't have time for, such as physics on plants and vegetation that moves as Sam brushes past.

Double Agent looks stunning too, with dynamic lighting, interactive water surfaces (from similar technology used in the movie *The Perfect Storm*), detailed

textures for skin that shimmers with sweat in the African sun, and clothes that fold and ruffle realistically in the urban sprawl of New York. Each of the game's 180-plus characters has been designed with the same care and attention as Sam Fisher, with asymmetric faces (not just left-right copies), skin texture, unique blemishes and subtle details such as the fact that a person's eyes will be animated even if they're wearing dark sunglasses.

Yes, it may be my jetlag speaking, but this brave re-invention of *Splinter Cell* looks very promising. Even without his trademark goggles, Sam Fisher (voiced again by Michael Ironside) is proving to be a heavyweight character who has the potential of real emotional highs and lows – something that was definitely missing in previous games. Having dual objectives for missions is something that I've wanted to see in more games. The great *TIE Fighter* and more recently titles such as *KOTOR* and *Oblivion* have allowed you to create your own path through the moral maze, and as a result have been infinitely more engaging. With *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, the stealth genre is evolving... 

Learn to swim with Sam Fisher.



If you run, you make yourself a bigger target – even in war.

**COMING
SOON...**

"Meeester De'ath, I presume..."

LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

Jon Blyth tiptoes through a minefield of ring-based innuendo

DEVELOPER Turbine PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE www.turbine.com

THE LOWDOWN

It's Middle-earth	✓
As faithful as a Labrador	✓
Bloody great Ringwraiths	✓
Soaks up inconvenient hours	✓
Tom Bombadil actually skips	✗

**ETA
Late
2006**

THEY'RE FAIR SPITTING them out over in Massachusetts.

Turbine, having just catapulted the online version of *Dungeons & Dragons* over the parapet, are just readying themselves for the release of *Shadows Of Angmar*, the first MMO to tackle Tolkien's Middle-earth.

You certainly can't call Turbine cowards, as both worlds come pregnant with expectations. Get it wrong, and you're upsetting the kind of people who'll set aside two weeks to bitch about you on the Net. Obviously, there's an upside too. Even if you're not sure how playing a hobbit might be a thrilling experience, there must be a million people gagging for the chance to chuck rocks at a Ringwraith. Well, there's 100,000 people registered on the forums, anyway.

You'll play LOTRO as one of the main races – human, elf, dwarf or hobbit (not orcs or Gandalfs), and there are seven classes, most of which are token Tolkienisations of common names. Rangers emerge as hunters, warriors as champions and so on. As proper magic

in Middle-earth is rare and powerful, Turbine have side-stepped mages and created the Loremaster. "There's no question we had to have a magic-using class," explains executive producer Jeffrey Steefel. "People expect that. But at same time, no-one's going to be a wizard. There are only five of those in Middle-earth." So Loremasters act like clerics, with access to magic-esque items.

Does this mean there's any tension between the game and the books? Steefel says not. "Tolkien Enterprises have been really good with finding that balance, where the world feels pure Middle-earth, but it's still fun to play."

ROAD TO MORDOR

The game is set towards the end of the third age (the time of the books), but you won't be tracing Frodo's footsteps. You play missions related to the fellowship's journey to Mordor, and you certainly run into all the characters. Just don't expect to be recruiting vast armies of the undead, or skateboarding down an elephant's spine.

At release, you can only play the good guys, so like *Stormreach* there's no PvP combat, with your focus on missions in impromptu fellowships. Solo missions will be technically possible, in the same way that dry-humping a porcupine is possible. Much better to find a few people who play the same way you do and work together.

An obvious issue is the fact that the books have an ending; the ring gets burned, and – as Peter Jackson understands it – everyone says goodbye and jumps on the bed for 30 minutes. So what's in store for LOTRO at that stage?

"There's a lot of possibilities," says Steefel. "We could reach forward into the fourth age and make our own interpretations of what Tolkien wrote. It'll most likely become a stable, persistent world. It'll take three, four, five years to get to that stage, though."

They certainly know their Rings, and even in Turbine's first game, *Asheron's Call*, groups were called fellowships. You get the feeling this is a game they really wanted to make. **PC2**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

CARPAL TUNNEL

All creatures are taken from Tolkien lore – the basis for today's fantasy as genre. There was a Tolkien consultant on the team, who made sure no-one was wearing a wristwatch or driving a helicopter.

BREATH OF FIRE

Fire-breathing is all very well and good, but magic spells are for wizards. Loremasters will have spell-like objects and effects, but shiny staff battles between you, Ian McKellen and Christopher Lee are highly unlikely.

GROUPS A DAISY

Combat has fellowship-based special moves, so if one person initiates a combo move, everyone else gets a timed chance to join in – if everyone does, you'll be doing some good killing.

HE THINKS HE'S PEOPLE

Look at the Hobbit, running around with human cutlery. Sadly, Hobbits are more suited to sneaky classes like the Burglar, so acts of bravado like this are much like undersized suicide. Oh dear.

BRAVE LITTLE DEAD GUYS

There's no health in *Shadows Of Angmar*. The traditional red bar indicates your morale. So you don't die, you just get defeated. And you don't suffer organ damage, you just feel sad for a while.



Throw the peanut then.



"I've got Monster Munch if you want some..."



Looks like a sale on curtains at Matalan.

Surviving a medieval-themed press trip

Solo missions will be technically possible, in the same way that dry-humping a porcupine is possible



BLEND IN

Convince more experienced journalists you belong there by resembling a shit-hatted waxwork.



EAT AS THEY EAT

Drinking free wine, then claiming to be Lord Of The Cumberland Rings OnWine will win you many friends.



BE A DANGEROUS IDIOT

If you get a sword, make sure you're drunk enough to want to wave it around a bit. Much approval ensues.



A perfect 'moony out the window' moment if ever I saw one.

SCREAM IF YOU WANNA GO FASTER...

GTR2

Suzy Wallace finds the perfect excuse to exorcise her speed demons...

DEVELOPER SimBin PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE www.10tacle.com/gtr-game/ PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

Realistic driving model	✓
Gorgeously detailed graphics	✓
Improved crash damage	✓
New time trial, driving school and 24-hour modes	✓
Won't help to build up your no-claims bonus	✗

IMPROVING UPON SOMETHING that's already great is always fraught with hazards. Recall if you will the great *Coco Pops* disaster of '98, when Kellogg's committed the cardinal sin of changing the name to Choco Krispies. Then how they had to hastily change it back again when hundreds of thousands of complaints from the great British public flooded in. When it comes to driving sims, SimBin seem to have already nailed the market quite squarely on the head with *GTR* and *GT Legends*, so what could they possibly improve upon with a sequel?

Rather than committing an atrocity by renaming the title *Great Track Racers 2*, giving all of the cars nitrous and putting some 360-degree loops into the tracks, SimBin's gone back to the high-octane roots of *GTR*, tweaked the already near-perfect gameplay, added some extra features and polished the entire lot to perfection.

This time round, the game's based around the 2004 FIA GT season and the vehicle count's been upped to over 140 cars, including the cars and tracks from the 2003 season featured in the original. Take a car out for a spin though and the

first thing you'll notice is an improvement in the graphics. Making full use of DirectX9 features, the cars sparkle and shine with even more lustre than before, interiors are resplendent with hi-res details and real-time shadows, fully animated drivers now reach for gears and push pedals, brake discs glow under heavy braking and reflections dazzle on wet tarmac.

WANNA GET DIRTY

The accelerated time feature from *GT Legends* has been brought over too, meaning that you can choose to literally drive through the night. Dynamic weather effects are also present with rain adding some gorgeous reflections on track, but serving to make the driving anything from slightly slippery to downright treacherous. Thankfully, the rain level can be adjusted in the menu, though rumours that downpours are mandatory when racing the British circuits have not yet been confirmed.

Out on track, things look better than ever. Every track in the new season comes complete with SimBin's customary attention to detail, older track versions are also included and five completely new tracks have been added, from Dubai to

Zhuhai. The superb LiveTrack system means that dirt accumulates on the track surface and should it rain, heavily-used areas of the track will dry out first.

Also on the receiving end of some attention is the damage model. During a quick night-time blast round Monza, I managed to take out my left headlight and promptly clipped a few barriers on that side thanks to my limited vision. Upon collision, sparks fly, body panels fall off, tyres can puncture and as if things weren't difficult enough already, a serious pile-up can leave your engine on fire. If you can limp into the pit, you'll also now have a fully animated team ready to repair your damage and 'fill her up'.

BRAIN DRAIN

The already stunning driving model has been tweaked even further too, and opponent AI has also received a boost with the addition of LiveBrain. Despite sounding like in-game complimentary cerebral matter, this means that AI drivers will now take a lap or two to warm up their tyres and adjust to the track, helping to even out the playing field between the player and the AI.

ETA
Summer

THE STORY SO FAR...

SIMBIN

SIMBIN



MODS & ROCKERS

A collection of peeps begin to create FIA GT mods for EA's F1 2002.

A GREAT START

Racing driver Henrik Roos gathers them up and decides to form SimBin.



POLE POSITION

SimBin announces the release of their first title, uber-realistic driving sim GTR.



LEGENDARY

Historic racing returns to the world of PC gaming again with GT Legends.

2003

2003

2004

2005

Surveying The Wreckage

Doing this in real life would bankrupt you for years, so we had to give it a go in-game...



It's a rolling start and with plenty of opponents both in front and behind me, things are looking good for maximum carnage.



Here comes the corner. Anyone with any sense will brake. Of course, that counts me out - I'm insured with Sheila's Wheels anyway...



The moment of impact is filled with debris, loose body parts and howls of despair from virtual insurance brokers.



When the dust clears, I'm still chuckling in what's left of my beautiful car. One casualty too - brilliant. I'm off to do it all again...



As well as racing, Scream also peddle condoms. True story.

Forget the lessons you took with an instructor who got nervous when you went over 30mph: GTR 2 has hi-octane tutorials on all aspects of driving



Rear spoiler or picnic bench? You decide.



Sparks will fly when jostling for position.

Don't think that the modes have escaped attention either - three entirely new ones have been added to the roster. Time Trial allows you to concentrate on setting one amazing lap time (with the option to download other's ghost runs to compete against), and 24-hour races around five of the tracks will also feature.

But our favourite addition is the Driving School. Forget the lessons you took with an instructor who got nervous every time you went over 30mph: these involve hi-octane tutorials on all aspects of driving, from effective gear changes to overtaking. Get them perfected to beat the instructor and you also unlock custom championships.

At first glance, it may appear that SimBin's changes are minor tweaks, but once you add them all together and put them on top of what's already a brilliant game, it's clear to see they're striving for nothing short of perfection. And judging by their past achievements and what we've seen so far, they may well achieve it. There'll be no Choco Krispies here... **PCZ**



Time to dig out those insurance details.



Anyone want their windscreen washed?





TankCon 2006 was a tad underwhelming.



Just like little metal ducklings.

I'VE GOT A PRESENT FOR YA...

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

With the future of the RTS in his hands, *Will Porter* prepares to reap the bitter tiberium harvest

**COVER
EXCLUSIVE!**

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE westwood.ea.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

- A return to Nod and GDI ☒
- Kane! FMVs! Hooray! ☒
- A new faction shrouded in mystery ☒
- Neato new dynamics in the gameplay ☒
- Why isn't it called 'Tiberian' like the others? ☐

DO YOU REMEMBER the first time you played *Command & Conquer*? It was probably a long time ago, perhaps before the genre became lost in the game's unending list of po-faced clones, but whenever it was I can guarantee one thing: you thought that the installation process was blinding. For me, booting up the original *C&C* demo off a *ZONE* coverdisc back in 1995, and having a sexy computer woman talking at me through a haze of futuristic green meshes was much like communing with God himself. But the best was yet to come: the gentle tinkle of harvested tiberium turning to cash, the trundle of Mammoth tanks, the distant scream of a grunt caught in a tiberium patch and those FMVs of Kane – marvellous, marvellous Kane. We won't see those days again.

Well not until *C&C3*, any road. "Really in our heart of hearts we're returning to the first *C&C*," explains executive producer Mike Verdu. "That crisp, fun feeling of the first one that felt like the military sort of slipped maybe 30 years into the future." Verdu and a nice PR lady are sitting bamboozled in front of me while I explain my love for *C&C* through the medium of vague impressions of the Commando. "It's a really rich universe and for people like me

who really cut their teeth on the original *C&C*, I can't imagine not doing another game set in that universe," Verdu continues. "It's a very compelling place – I always thought tiberium was incredibly cool and Kane was one of the most compelling villains." So Kane's coming back? The bald, brilliant, bearded bastard is coming back? "Oh yeah," nods Verdu. "Oh, yeah."

ONE VISION

When we last left the *Tiberium* universe in *Tiberian Sun* expansion pack *Firestorm* (before returning to the still wackier antics of Yuri and co in *Red Alert 2* and the determinedly bullish, grumpy and serious demeanour of *Generals*), the evil Nod super-computer CABAL (that sounded like a robot Bob Hoskins) was having a shit-fit – and both the goody-two-shoes GDI and nefarious Nod had to team up against it. This uneasy no-score draw seems to have continued beyond the end of the game – until now that is.

"The year that the game starts is 2047, so it's been a while since the end of *Firestorm*," begins Verdu as he trots out the initial set-up of *Tiberium Wars*. "When the game starts there's been a period of relative peace, so the GDI have started work on trying to reverse the tiberium

outbreak, and tiberium is everywhere. It's gotten pretty bad by the time the game opens; there are outbreaks in a lot of different areas. A good part of the Earth's surface, as much as 20%, is uninhabitable – it's like the surface of an alien planet at this point." Make note of that word 'alien' kids, we're coming to that soon...

"So it's now really nasty and GDI is running the projections and saying: 'Yeah, another 80 years or so and there's going to be nothing left, this planet's gone'. So they're working really hard now that the war has died down to reverse the contamination and start restoring Earth to the state it was before."

GETTING THE NOD

But while the GDI have their back turned, too busy saving whales and sending letters of environmental complaint to the letters page in the *Metro*, the Nod are building up their forces. Seeing as the Nod aren't usually too backward with their warfare, what with their training camps that look like giant hands and gigantic death-pyramid obelisks, you might have thought that it'd be easy to spot their fresh recruitment drive in the tiberium-ravaged Yellow Zone hinterlands of the globe – but the GDI remain blissfully unaware of

**ETA
2007**



Fresh from tank lessons, the tanks were invigorated and eager to be tanks.



Kane's resurgence. Until, also unsurprisingly, he strikes. And strikes hard.

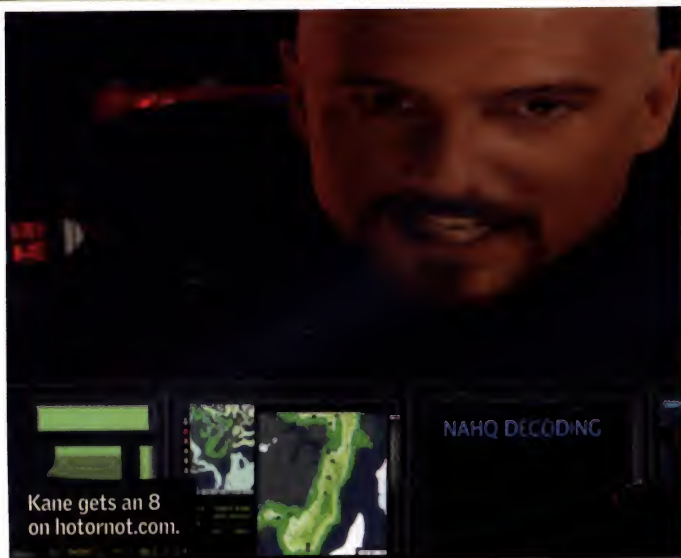
"They blow up the Philadelphia which is GDI's orbiting command centre, and that decapitates the GDI command structure," continues Verdu. "And so GDI is reeling; Nod pours into all of GDI's strongholds and things are looking pretty grim. And that's where you, a GDI commander on the frontlines, has to pull things together, rally the troops, launch a counter-attack, drive Nod out of the GDI areas and take the war to them." Or, of course, where you play as the Nod blowing the Philadelphia up and piling on into GDI territory. Or (cue drumroll), where you playing as



"It's a rich universe, and for people like me who cut their teeth on the original *C&C*, I can't imagine not doing another game set within it"

Mike Verdu, executive producer, *C&C3: Tiberium Wars*

I love my FMV Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the cut-scene...



Kane gets an 8 on hotornot.com.

Hark! The return of the '90s! Speak, oh executive producer! "We're staying very true to the *Command & Conquer* original series and yeah, we're doing FMV cut-sequences," explains Mike Verdu. "But we're also telling the story in all aspects of the single-player campaign. So not just in the cut-scenes between missions, but also in the way we're crafting mission objectives – the way we're setting up the missions to tie very closely into the story." So in essence – those wonderfully hammy and often quite ingenious cut-scenes are making a comeback. Casting is only just getting started, so no clues as to whether Hollywood talent will get pulled in, but it's a safe bet that the goatee of Joseph D Kucan will resume Kane duties, since he's also been the FMV and dialogue director of the series since forever. So in summary: YES! YES YES YES! FMVs are back – next stop *Phantasmagoria 3!*

a new third MYSTERIOUS faction (clash cymbals, pause for stunnage).

ALIEN NATION

Now EA aren't keen on revealing anything about the Nod (the game isn't that far into production, and the marketing machine hasn't got that far yet), but they're revealing even less on the third contingent entering the *C&C* universe. Now it could be one of the Haywire AIs from *Firestorm*, but that would just be bleedin' dull – so the odds-on bet is that we'll be dealing with a force that's much less close to home. Tiberium itself is widely acknowledged to have come from the inky blackness of space (and the GDI themselves stumbled on the wreckage of an alien spacecraft back in *Tiberian Sun*), so the concept of aliens terraforming Earth through the tiberium plague before turning up, 'man with a van' in tow, intent on moving in through force is a prime possibility. EA's own stance after a long process of journalistic badgering runs as follows.

Me: "What can you tell us about the mysterious third faction?" Verdu: "Not much right now. Their entrance into the scene is shrouded in mystery at this point. I can't really say much about it other than there's a third side." Me: "Would they by any chance perhaps have something to do with the presence of the tiberium on Earth

maybe? Verdu: "Erm... I think you can draw your own conclusions."

Conclusions drawn then. Let's move onto the bread and butter of *C&C* – past the shiny Westwood-cum-EA gloss – and find out how it's going to play. "It's worth highlighting the kind of game that we're building, and that's fast, fluid, responsive and very crisp in execution," explains Verdu, clearly glad we're veering away from things we're not allowed to discuss. "When you click, we want the game to react instantly – there's just no delay from when you give a unit an order and its response. We're setting a very high standard for ourselves – if you play a game that came out perhaps five years ago, it runs just lightning fast on a computer from the present day. It just has this delightfully crisp responsive feel to it, and that's the essence of what we're trying to get to."

OLD FAMILIARS

A lot of what's returning is blindingly obvious – the Mammoth, the Orca, the Commando, the Nod Stealth tank, the Ion Cannon, the Nuke superweapon, the Hand of Nod – there'd be rioting on the streets if they didn't show their big metal faces. As for battlefields – expect barren wastelands with tiberium glaciers welling up from underneath, deserts, tundra and



THE STORY SO FAR...

C&C

IT BEGINS

Westwood release *Command & Conquer* through Virgin. Everyone cries with joy.

1995

ENTER EA

Big bower boys of computer gaming eat Westwood whole. It tastes nice.

1998



SUN ARISE

Tiberian Sun is released. Kane gets up to more mischief, the monkey.

1999

GLORIOUS DECADE

Command & Conquer celebrates its birthday by blowing up 17 sequential sheds.

2006



Each ripple is hand-designed by 1,000 ocean-ripple experts.



"I only left you for five minutes!"

even the fully-functioning, super-modern cities of the previously secure 'blue zones'. One of the many avenues that EA are looking thoughtful about is just how destructible these areas will be – wanting to ramp up damage sequences for buildings so that you'll be able to blast pieces off them and have a good look at their interiors. Seeing as cityscapes were already pretty impressive, what with building occupations and flashbangs in *Generals*, god only knows what they'll be like come *C&C3*.

In fact, technology-wise, we're still looking at what was created for *Generals* – albeit substantially upgraded through the *BFME* series. "It's not disposable technology – there's a good solid foundation there that we continue to build on," adds Verdu. "We added a lot of new stuff for *BFME2* and we continue to do work on the engine – tightening up the

controls, making improvements on the graphics... We're doing basically a new particle system that will allow us to create these magnificent explosions, smoke and fire and weather effects. The technology is definitely coming along."

And when the man says weather – he's not just talking about scattered showers subtly relieving the pain of soldiers charred by a quick march through a hectare of tiberium. He's talking ion storms – which, in essence, are large, swirly and liable to change battlefield conditions like the ion wind. Quite how these gusty scientific monstrosities will affect gameplay is in constant discussion in EA's Californian digs – current thought being that one of the sides (perhaps even the MYSTERY one) is so keyed into tiberium usage and

"It's worth highlighting the kind of game we're building: fluid, fast, responsive and crisp in execution"

Mike Verdu, executive producer, *C&C3: Tiberium Wars*

ion things that their units' effectiveness will vary depending on how close they are to a storm's centre. They'll even be able to summon a storm after an impromptu technological raindance, and shift it about the place at their whim – no doubt important since not everyone will be so keen on all those ions flying around all over the place. Whatever the hell an ion actually is – all I know about ions is that they're purple in *Star Trek*.

WONDERFUL TOYS

Trapped beneath these storms of twirling purple (maybe) storminess, meanwhile, will be some fresh new units. GDI Mammoth tanks (so familiar and nice that I'd almost describe them as cuddly) are getting an upstart cousin that's very much in the model of Scrappy Doo – although perhaps less liable to stand in a small box on a railway platform or swing on convenient ropes. This Predator tank will be faster and more agile than the Mammoth, with less armour and a potential railgun upgrade. It will also be far, far less likely to be carried away in a runaway mine cart shouting "Raggy!" But I digress.

"As far as infantry goes there's a rifleman, a missile-trooper and a grenadier, and each fulfils a role in the combat chain," continues Verdu, unaware that my mind is

Come on down, the water looks lovely.

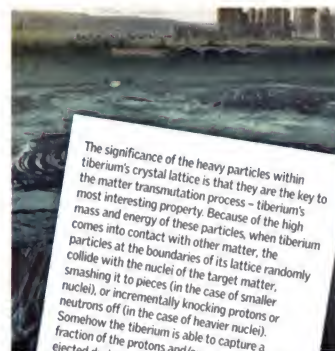




Bagsying a landing platform can be a nightmare.

But what's tiberium?

EA hire real scientists to turn fiction into fact



If you're a noob: tiberium is toxic, alien stuff that hurts people but can be used as an energy source. So you harvest it and it goes 'tinkle tinkle tinkle'. EA wanted to add a little more depth to it though – so they hired some M.I.T. students to write a thesis. True story. Here's an excerpt from those very boffins...

The significance of the heavy particles within tiberium's crystal lattice is that they are the key to most interesting property. Because of the high mass and energy of these particles, when tiberium comes into contact with other matter, the particles at the boundaries of its lattice randomly smashing it to pieces (in the case of smaller nuclei), or incrementally knocking protons or neutrons off (in the case of heavier nuclei). Somehow the tiberium is able to capture a fraction of the protons and/or neutrons that are ejected during this collision process and incorporate them into its own structure, thus growing. Whenever a muon or tauon collides with an atomic nucleus, fission occurs, which results in the random production of alpha, beta and gamma radiation, as well as other forms of electromagnetic radiation (such as infra-red). During the transmutation process, nuclei that tiberium has come into contact with may be changed into nuclei with different (usually fewer) numbers of protons or neutrons. The result is a complete elemental transformation.

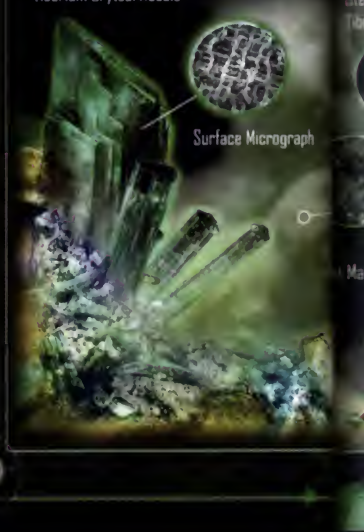
inexplicably fixed somewhere above the cartoons of Hanna-Barbera rather than his thrilling new RTS. "In particular, we have a unit called the Zone Trooper which is like elite heavy infantry in a power-suit. He's really good for tramping around red zones that are infested with tiberium." Unable to think of a Hanna-Barbera analogy for this, we'll move on to the new Firehawk fast-attack jet – a fast high-altitude aircraft that you can deploy really quickly. And, interestingly enough, it wouldn't be that out of place in *The Jetsons*.

IDEAS FACTORY

Thing is though, we haven't quite finished with the experimental concepts rolling around the great big ex-Westwood octagonal tombola development drum. For example, there's the idea of giving one of the sides a mobile base (which would perhaps make sense if they were maybe, perhaps, potentially part of a MYSTERY expeditionary alien force). Doubling up as centre for resource/production management and supreme mega-combat, the idea is that it'll provide an 'all or nothing' feel to combat, especially in multiplayer, in which the heart of your

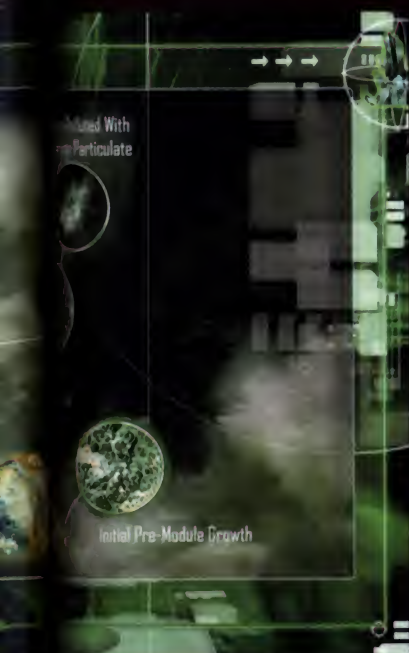
Here's the science bit. Very interesting. **DSE UP**

Tiberium Crystals Nodule





Polite tank drivers leave the fleet to do a trump.



operations will be at the forefront of your assault. Another feature, meanwhile, will be customisation through combination – jamming two units together to create a super-unit with the capabilities of both. So you could make something that's generally ground-based and mix it with a touch of airpower – although whether or not this capability will be reserved for one MYSTERIOUS force or will be open to all three has not been revealed.

THEATRE, DAHLINK

One thing that'll be the same for GDI good, Nod bad and Whoever MYSTERIOUS though, is the intriguing way that campaigns will work in *C&C3* – adding a touch of the non-linear to proceedings.

"Each campaign is actually made up of what we're calling 'theatres of war'," picks up Verdu. "And in each one you'll actually have a choice of what targets you go after, and what order to get to an ultimate goal. For each of those missions there's a very specific benefit that rolls forward into subsequent ones. For example, you might have an area that has an airfield, a port and an R&D lab all leading to a goal of some kind. Do you go for the airfield and get air-strikes or air units that you

wouldn't have had before? Do you go for the port and get maybe an aircraft carrier or a battleship to support your assault on the target? Or do you go for the R&D lab and maybe get a tech upgrade?"

Lying alongside these branching tales of violence, meanwhile, will be one of your own making. A World Domination mode that'll do what it says on the tin – letting you select a starting location on the globe, build structures and units and proceed to dominate things world-wide. Coupled with the ever-resilient *C&C* multiplayer (now packaged with VOIP and spectator modes) then as a package *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* looks like it'll more than make up for having 11 entire syllables in its name.

In fact, the only thing that would make me more intrigued about *Command & Conquer 3*, is if Tanya out of *Red Alert* managed to make some sort of dimension jump into the game – but that's only because I'm a boy and thereby a fan of sexy FMV ladies who kill. It's still a way off, and it has some hefty competition in the form of *Supreme Commander*, but to have it on the horizon makes the strategy scene a brighter and more happy place. Welcome back, Commander. **PCZ**



Jason's Argo-Nod

We chat to lead game designer Jason Bender on *C&C3*



What are you most excited about in the game?

"I'm excited about playing with my favourite *Command & Conquer* units in an updated engine and capturing that crisp, fast, responsive *C&C* gameplay, with all the units being really well balanced against each other. I just can't wait to play my first multiplayer game – I'm really excited about that."

What do you think are the most important parts of the original's spirit you really need to capture?

"Gameplay-wise, what I've been thinking about the most is making sure that every unit you have is important to you – you kind of want to say, 'Oh man, I just love that Mammoth tank, I can't wait to get it out on the field'. You want to feel that every time you start the game – not just because it looks cool, but because it plays well and it's important to your strategy."

How serious is the game going to be?

"*C&C* has always been somewhat over-the-top science-fiction, but because it's set in the near future it's never been completely gonzo. The real comedy title has always been *Red Alert*, so it'll be more serious than the *Red Alert* titles have been."

In terms of new units and weapons – what are your favourites?

"I like the Zone Trooper because we all remember the FMV of the poor GDI soldier standing in the tiberium field as horrible cancers popped up all over his body – he didn't look happy! I like the idea that GDI sort of responded to that by protecting their guys and giving them the ability to move out into what's turned into a very hostile world, and move around with this futuristic, highly trained infantry that are armed to the teeth."



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New issue

OUT NOW





PCZONE

REVIEWS

Scaling the heights of PC gaming

Lesson learnt

OVER THE LAST month, I've spent an unhealthy amount of time playing *Oblivion*. I've journeyed to the far corners of Cyrodiil, been followed around by a demented unicorn that insists on being my horse and punishing me every time I draw my weapon, been crowned Champion of the Arena and prevailed in becoming Archmage.

Unfortunately, I've been relegated to playing it in my study on a 17-inch CRT, while my boyfriend's been smugly sitting on the comfy sofa playing it on his 42-inch hi-def plasma TV and saying how great his Xbox 360 is. However, I had the last laugh, as barely two weeks after getting the game, his Xbox 360 started to crash – and when that happens to your supposedly failsafe, top-of-the-range, next-gen console, it's a big problem. Eventually, the machine wouldn't even turn on and had to be returned for repairs.

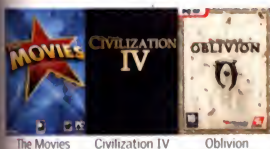
In the meantime, I went out, spent some money on a cable and am now running my PC through the TV with 42-inch graphics. Who needs next-gen consoles anyway?

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



GAME OF THE MONTH

62

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

Clancy's latest tactical shooter dominates

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

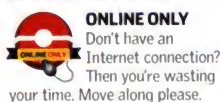
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DISCS

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X6a-64.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.4GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	1GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

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- 70 **SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE**
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- 74 **TABLOID TYCOON**
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- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at yourshout@pczone.co.uk



Despite its current lack of anti-aliasing options, *Advanced Warfighter* looks amazing.

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER



Steve Hogarty is the ghostest with the mostest...

DEVELOPER Grin Software
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.ghostrecon.com/uk/
ghostrecon3
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

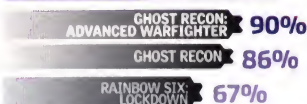


AT A GLANCE...

The *Ghost Recon* series sees its finest iteration to date. Beautiful, polished and hugely involving, Grin Software have done a brilliant job.

System requirements 4

HOW IT STACKS



BREATHTAKING. A SCENE that produces audible gasps from anybody standing in the vicinity of the monitor, *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter's* introduction is nothing short of amazing. Standing in the hold of a plane, thousands of feet above one of the largest cities in the world with a squad of fully geared-up soldiers, you leap into the HDR-shrouded abyss outside, the buffeting winds drowned out only by a video feed playing over your heads-up display.

With the details of your mission feeding directly into your ear, you suddenly break cloud cover. The entirety of Mexico City sprawls beneath you, from real-time horizon to real-time horizon. Roads, buildings, parks, industrial centres, skyscrapers – the detail is all there and it's simply astounding. The almost expected loading screen never comes. Instead, the ground speeds towards you and gravity rubs its hands together with glee. As you open your parachute, you're jerked about violently, your neck snaps up to see a parachute, then is jolted down to see your legs (hooray).

Spinning in arcing loops and absorbing the views, you eventually come to rest on an

abandoned motorway. In a matter of seconds you've gone from the arse of a military plane to the heart of Mexico City in about as accurate a way as current technology will allow. And it's *brehtaking*.

LIKE A VERSION

Not to be confused with the Xbox 360 'equivalent', the PC version of Clancy's squad-based shooter is a far more tactical game (with a much better introduction), and in typical Clancy near-future style sees you dealing with a rebel uprising in Mexico City putting the president's life in danger. The console version is a noteworthy game in its own right, but is so far removed from the PC game that it's difficult even to draw comparison. In place of the 360's arcade-style, third-person view and simplified tactics, you have a semi-realistic feel, a solid first-person view and advanced tactical options which you'll depend on heavily throughout the game.

Specifically, the tactical map has been hugely improved from the 360's, allowing waypoints and individual orders; the third-person view has been dropped completely; and the difficulty has been ramped up to

promote strategic play. It's a different game, and it's arguably prettier too if you can afford to bump up the visual sliders, with subtle HDR effects and normal mapping adding immense amounts of detail.


But why the different versions? Well, rather than developing a straight port, Red Storm dished out their art assets, script, design brief and a picture of Tom Clancy looking angry to a mostly unknown Norwegian developer, Grin Software, and let them do their own thing (albeit under the close supervision of Ubisoft). And what Grin Software have done with the Clancy licence is simply astonishing.

A LOTTA MEGALOPOLIS


"But wait!" I hear you cry. "I've seen this already. This looks like a game I've played. That insurgent right there, I've widowed his wife and unfathered his children twice before. What's the difference?"

Well yes, urban warfare is in fashion right now and yes, you've shot down rebels in the streets before – but what *Advanced Warfighter* offers is a far more varied and atmospheric environment than any other squad-based shooter. OK, so I've never been

In seconds, you've gone from the arse of a military plane to the heart of Mexico City in about as accurate a way as current technology will allow. And it's simply breathtaking...



El Ángel: just like Trafalgar Square, but without the pigeons.

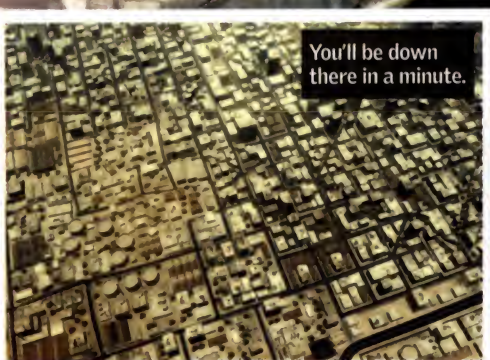


This is why you can't use mobiles at petrol stations.


to the megalopolis of Mexico City, but Google has confirmed that many of the city's famed landmarks are intact and accurately reproduced. Lead your squad down the Paseo de la Reforma, call in airstrikes over El Ángel, fight in other places that may or may not have any meaning to you, but either way *Advanced Warfighter* carries an air of authenticity and realism about it.

In your initial skydive, you can even make out pretty much every area you'll visit in the course of your mission. The game sounds superb too, with stirring scores accompanying the action at just the right moments. Whether defending Mexico City's equivalent of Trafalgar Square from rebel tank assaults or being pinned down on an arbitrary street corner, *Advanced Warfighter* manages to breathe life into what could easily have been a series of stale areas.

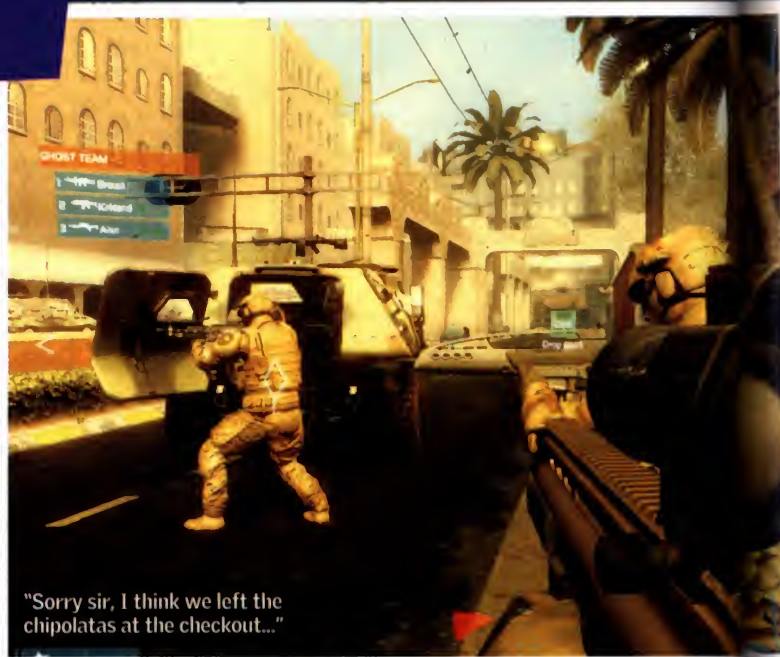
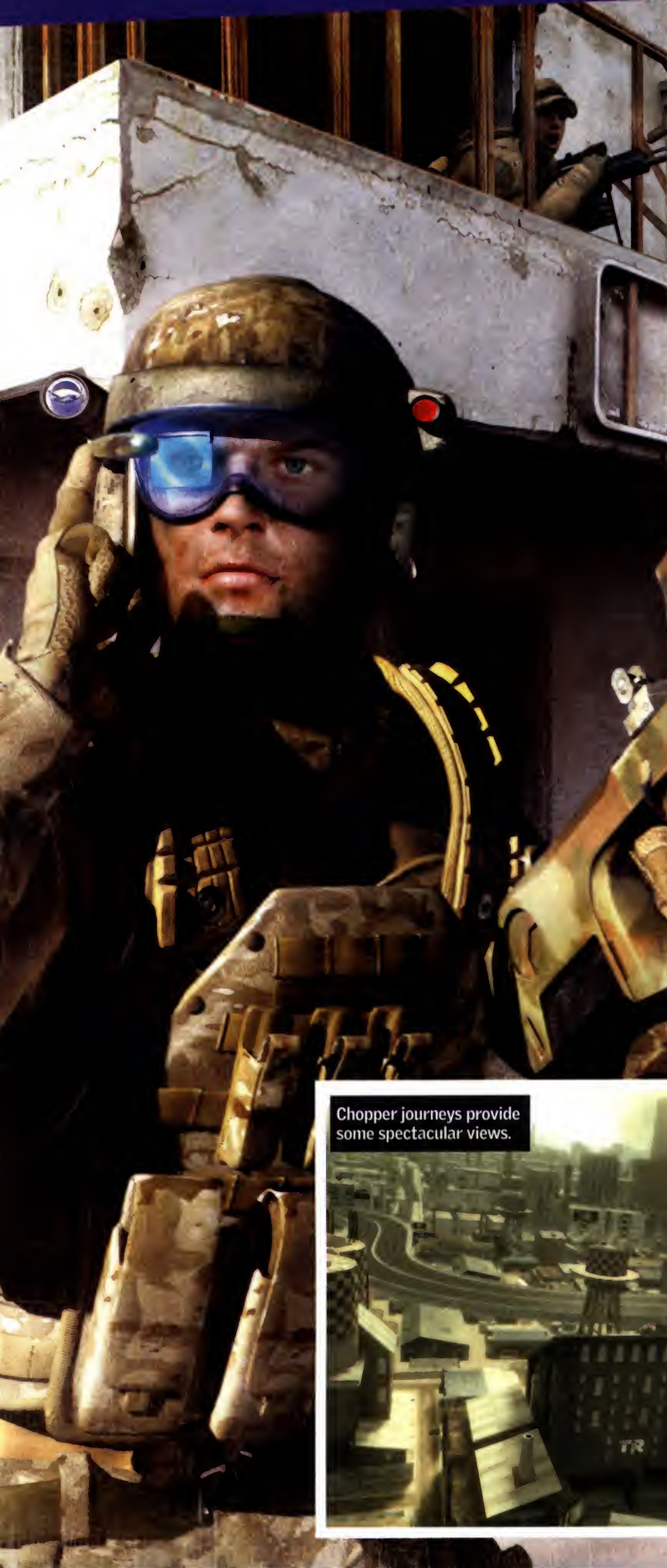
Not only is the introduction blindingly impressive, it sets you up for a level of production that will repeatedly leave you in awe of whatever set-piece or location *Advanced Warfighter* serves you. Moving from mission to mission is almost seamless for the entire time you play – you'll never be ripped out of



You'll be down there in a minute.



"Oh piss off! I've still got three minutes."



Chopper journeys provide some spectacular views.



the gameworld to face briefing screens or confusing inventory menus.

Instead, missions usually end with you being extracted via *Advanced Warfighter's* pretty skies and setting off high above the beautiful details of the city below. A single screen then evaluates your performance, a single click loads the next mission and your often-spectacular entrance is provided by the same vehicle you left the last mission in. Simply by doing away with needless distractions, the game keeps you constantly involved and eager to turn rebellious Mexicans into bullet-ridden ragdolls.

TECH SPEC

That's not what makes it unique, however. As you may have noticed in the screenshots, *Advanced Warfighter's* signature visor-style HUD is more than a simple visual gimmick. Being the type of soldier suggested by the game's title, your country's vast technological superiority has developed a piece of equipment as impressive as an iPod and a George Foreman grill combined.

They've called it the Cross-Com, and it singularly elevates the game's tactical side to remarkable standards. Whereas many, many FPS games overlay waypoint info onto the screen, the Cross-Com (which by in-game explanation is a cool little monocle screen which sits on your helmet's visor), and the visor in general, add something a bit

"Run into the light!"



Even with this sort of detail, soldiers generally remain emotionless.



Terry always gets the window seat.



more fundamental to *Advanced Warfighter*. Not just waypoints and objectives, but the locations of your squad, your allies, allied vehicles, enemies, enemy vehicles and so on.

For example, any enemies in your view are marked with a red diamond, obviously enough. Any enemies in your squad members' views are marked with a red diamond too however, meaning their visual information becomes your tactical information. Imagine the spotting binoculars from *Far Cry*, minus the ability to 'save' the enemies locations – once they wander out of everybody's fields of vision, their red diamond goes with them. This means you can send a team-mate to a high vantage point and use him to literally scout the area for hostiles, while you and your remaining squad clean up with ease using the information appearing on your Cross-Com.

DRONING ON...

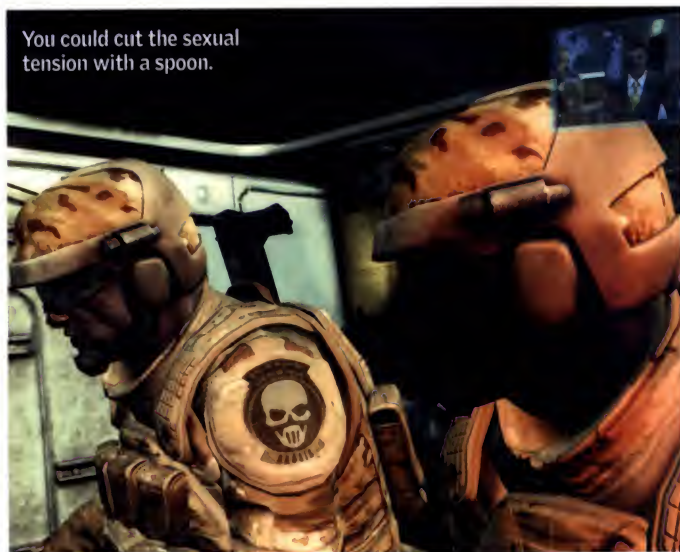
Tying into this idea of intel-gathering gameplay is the occasional inclusion of Cypher drones. Basically a camera mounted on a miniature, silent helicopter (these things actually exist too), the drone will go where you tell it to and relay via your Cross-Com information about enemy positions. On levels where you have access to the drone, it becomes essential – the rebels are



Better together

Multiplicity in multiple cities... Well, one city

You could cut the sexual tension with a spoon.



Just as the 360 version of *Advanced Warfighter* plays host to a multiplayer mode which almost outshines the single-player mode in terms sheer fun, so does the PC version. In fact, it actually contains quite an innovative array of online options too. The co-op mode allows you to play the single-player levels with up to three other players. A team leader is chosen to assign waypoints and orders to his troops, as well as getting his hands dirty too. In an interesting twist, the death of the team leader means game over for the entire team. The competitive mode is even more interesting: teams must capture sectors, and if they can maintain control of a series of sectors, much like in *UT's* Onslaught mode, they receive supply line bonuses such as more ammo and the ability to spawn beside a team leader. Should make a nice change from bog-standard deathmatching.

Skewered on a tank. Nasty.



well-armed, and your ability to know which walls they're hiding behind is your biggest advantage throughout the game. It's not perfect either, even from 80ft it can't see through buildings, so there's always the chance of an undetected enemy catching you off guard – a lot like encountering a plucky grunt you hadn't spotted in *Far Cry*. It adds a well-balanced cautionary element to your progression through an area, and one that keeps the tension high throughout.

Other features of the cunningly-implemented Cross-Com include the ability to see through your squad's visor-mounted cameras, or from the birds-eye drone camera, or more



Frenetic kinetic

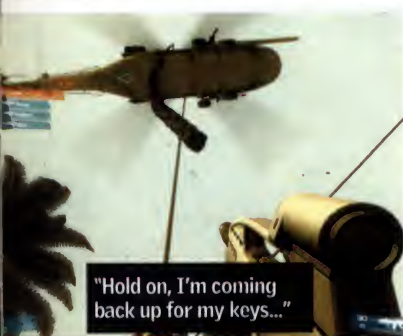
It's equal to a half emvee-squared you know...



What did we do before particles?

Advanced Warfighter is one of the first games to support the magical new AGEIA physics card, which improve performance by taking the strain of physics calculations off of the main processor, a bit like a little friend with a calculator. This doesn't just mean more realistic I've-just-been-shot-in-the-face-and-now-I'm-falling-down physics, it means things like explosions can be rendered far easier too – and you know how much everybody loves blowing shit up. Personally, I want a game where I can shake my monitor and everything in the game falls off shelves and characters stumble about before shaking their tiny fists at you. Only then would I shell out for one of these cards.

He'll never make a three-point turn.



"Hold on, I'm coming back up for my keys..."

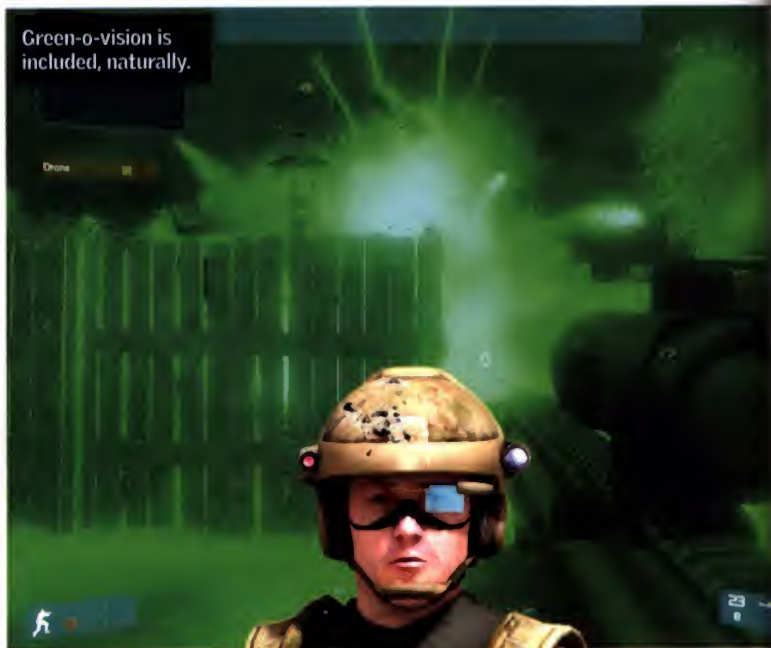
importantly from the military UAV flying high above the city. It's not as fancy as it sounds, effectively an overhead map in real-time, but it allows you to accurately position waypoints and issue orders to your soldiers, or just scout for enemies and objectives. The more you know about your surroundings, the easier battle becomes. *Advanced Warfighter* is all about using your technical superiority to the best of its potential.

But what about the squads themselves? Squad-based shooters are renowned for their inept and infuriating squad AI. Whether they're running directly into gunfire or just running backwards and forwards like senile old women, squads are a minefield of potential problems. Not so with *Advanced Warfighter*. Well... Not so much. The command interface works as you'd expect it to: middle-click to produce a menu and then mousewheel up and down through the various commands. Move, Cover and Attack are the ones you'll use most, and are pretty self-explanatory.

GOT THE HUMP

1,400 words in, however, and we hit a bump. The commands you give are only carried out in a vague manner, which sometimes causes problems. Command your men either individually or as a group to move to a wall and they'll take up defensive positions in areas of cover roughly where you told them to. Often, they'll take cover quite a distance

Green-o-vision is included, naturally.



Fly my pretties

Squads, you've got to love them. For all their inadequacies and stupidity, they're only trying to please you, just like big silly dogs with floppy ears and guns. Here's how best to utilise your deadly, and distinctly non-canine, companions...



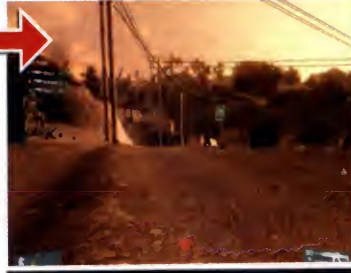
OK men, we've got Mexicans holed-up in a bunker at the far end of this street. They're firing at us with some sort of gun machine, so watch out.



Using the UAV, I plot out individual and complex patrol routes for my soldiers. Pincer movements, blitzkrieg, the big dipper, they're all in there.



Execute! Execute! My killing machines move through the village with surgical precision. They only find one rebel, but they shoot him loads. Good job.



Of course, the best part of commanding a squad is staying behind where it's safe and making them do all the hard work. As shown here.



from the place you told them to go, but while this means they won't get riddled with bullets, it often means you don't feel like you're in direct control of them.

CLEVER COVER

This is remedied by the very nature of the game however, with level design and the abilities of your comrades meaning you never need to place them specifically. Give them the gist of your desires and let them figure the rest out.

They rarely make stupid decisions and take cues from your own actions. If you shoot in a certain direction, they check for enemies in that direction and take suitable cover; if they're being fired upon, they stay under cover. Even their responses change depending on the situation: if all's quiet, a move order will be met with a calm, "Moving into position"; and when everything around you is exploding in a hail of bullets and rubble, a command to retaliate is met with a fear-tinted yell of: "Uhh... Yes sir."

It's details like that – details like the sound of the bullet whizzing past your head and tearing a chunk out of the wall, details like the gravel staining your visor as you desperately slide into cover, details like the

lovely 'chrshhhh' noise that makes – it's details like that which comprise *Advanced Warfighter's* appeal. The animations are worth mentioning too; even simple actions like running and diving into a prone position are impressive to watch. The enemy's AI is of similar calibre too – they're just as adept at finding cover and keeping you suppressed, just as adept at spotting you, and on the higher difficulty settings, just as adept at putting a bullet in your face in that fraction of a second before you do the same.

IN THE COUNTRY

Through sheer uniqueness of location, the city never becomes repetitive either. But therein lies another problem with the game. As your mission progresses, you'll see less of the city streets and more of the suburban mountainsides we see so much of in these kinds of games. Ironically, outside of the city you'll find your progress is more linear and not as graphically polished as the buildings and brickwork of the urban locales. Nevertheless, these areas are only mildly less enjoyable than the rest of the game and serve to break up the mission structure in such a way as to make the return to the cityscape all that more spectacular.

"Saaarge, he keeps... Stop it!... He keeps putting his foot on my side!"



At its best, *Advanced Warfighter* is every bit as enjoyable as *Far Cry* and *Half-Life 2*, two games which we still hold to be at the pinnacle of the FPS genre. It's only let down by some less than inspirational later levels and a lack of any real narrative to get your teeth into, but even these fail to mar the game's excellence significantly.

The world is fully realised, it feels solid and vibrant. The enemies are smart, the allies are smarter. The Cross-Com is a brilliant addition to the game, seamlessly integrating tactical information and decisions onto the main screen. The developers have totally thrown out the niggles that plague similar games and delivered a massively tactical experience that's easy to play. The direction is of movie-quality, the scenery and surroundings are some of the best seen in any game, ever. What's more, the action feels meaty and substantial and the music is rousing, complementing the game brilliantly. *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* is simply a, fantastic achievement. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Just amazing
Sound Fantastic, drawing you in instantly
Multiplayer Yes – see 'Better Together', p65

- ✓ Amazing visuals
- ✓ Intricate, clever and huge maps
- ✓ Fantastic squad AI
- ✓ Beautifully detailed and absorbing
- ✓ Excellent direction and voice-acting
- ✗ Some weaker later levels

90

Spectre-tacular



Fiery demon? Check.



The battle map increases in size according to the number of units.



It's hardly *SimCity*, which is a very good thing.



One of the game's grittier moments.

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

Heroes wanted, must have might. Magic an advantage. Step forward *Richie Shoemaker*

DEVELOPER Nival Interactive
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.mightandmagic.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Colourful turn-based high fantasy strategy that'll have you intrigued after an hour and addicted after two.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

AGE OF WONDERS II 82%

HOMMV 80%

SPELLFORCE 2 76%

IF YOU BEGAN your association with *Might And Magic* around 2002 when the last *Heroes* game emerged, you were probably left wondering what all the fuss was about. It wasn't that the game was bad, far from it, but there was the distinct feeling that the financially-beleaguered developers were running on goblin vapours. Two lacklustre expansions later (plus an abominable last chapter to the venerable *Might And Magic* itself), and 3DO were no more.

Whatever the original developers are up to now, bankruptcy has clearly done wonders for the 12-year-old series. Self-confessed *HOMM* fans Nival (partially famous for WWII RTS *Blitzkrieg*) have been in the developer's seat since 2003, prior to which they garnered some well-deserved critical acclaim for their short-lived *Etherlords* series. Clearly, these guys were the perfect choice to drag the series kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Ostensibly, gameplay-wise, very little appears to have changed: you explore each map, hoard resources, build up cities, raise armies and level-up

against various stock fantasy beasts until the campaign or your multiplayer session is done. As hinted at in the title however, *Heroes Of Might And Magic* is about your heroes rather than the armies themselves, with gameplay akin to a grand boardgame rather than some frenzied RTS.

FROM ZERO TO HERO

Without wanting to state the obvious, graphically we're generations ahead of the last game. But even though we have detailed 3D models wielding swords, the garish – some might say camp – vibrancy of the series has not been lost.

Best of all, gone are the tiny icons that befuddled the previous games, and impatient newcomers can happily toss the manual aside thanks to extensive tooltips and a learning curve that seems pitched damn-near perfectly. Committed fans shouldn't fret however; the storyline minces along in typical *Might And Magic* style and the range of multiplayer options are such that the game will linger on your hard drive way past the summer months.

Truthfully, *HOMMV* is better in every department than its predecessor. It's

grittier, funnier, prettier, more accessible, more strategic and rammed full of multiplayer goodness. Did I mention it's also turn-based? Don't let that put you off. Fantasy warmongering is rarely this good. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Garish, but endlessly charming
Sound Noises meaty, music fitting
Multiplayer 8-player battles in hotseat, LAN or Net

- ✓ Complexity borne from simple concepts
- ✓ True to the series
- ✓ Looks good
- ✗ Hackneyed dialogue
- ✗ Camp (but in a nice way)

80

A heroic return to form



THE AGE OF THE
HERO COMETH..!

SpellForce2

SHADOW WARS

21ST APRIL 2006

WWW.SPELLFORCE2.COM



Best in-game forklift since *Far Cry*?

SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE



Martin Korda finds out whether the first chapter of this episodic shooter is a sinner or a saint

DEVELOPER Ritual Entertainment
PUBLISHER Valve Software
WEBSITE www.ritual.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$20 (£11)

AT A GLANCE...

The first chapter of a three-part episodic FPS featuring plenty of tense – if often old school – action, some hugely challenging enemies and powered by Valve's superb Source engine.

System requirements 2

HOW IT STACKS

HALF-LIFE 2 97%

QUAKE IV 84%

SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE 83%

WHAT CAN YOU buy for 11 quid these days? A cinema ticket and a can of fizzy pop, maybe with enough left over for a bag of chips for the bus ride home? A pack of 12 condoms for 18 minutes of unbridled pleasure? An IndieZone game? Or how about the first chapter of an episodic first-person shooter, powered by Valve's stunning Source engine and packing somewhere between six and ten hours of non-stop, frenetic, gut-twisting, firefight-filled action. Sound tempting? Want to know more? Then don't go away.

If you read our preview of *Emergence* a couple of issues ago, you'll probably know that we were getting pretty excited about the game's release – unless of course you were reading the article backwards, in which case you'll have no idea whatsoever what we were talking about.

For the uninitiated, *Emergence* is the follow-up to 1998's *SiN*. It's also the first instalment of what's planned to be a three-chapter, episodic FPS adventure, which you

can download via Steam. As maverick law enforcer John Blade, you must protect Freeport City from the heinous plans of villain/geneticist and head of the hugely powerful SinTEK corporation Elexis Sinclair, while simultaneously uncovering the missing pieces of your own past.

Granted, as a premise for a plot, it's hardly Tolstoy, but the way that it's presented is done with some aplomb, melding subtle flashbacks with well-written and convincingly acted in-engine cut-scenes. So, we're off to a good start.

FUN, FUN, GUN

Despite the visual similarities to *Half-Life 2*, *Emergence* is a very different game. For starters, you won't find the fiendish physics-based mind-bending puzzles of Valve's masterpiece here; neither will you find a dynamic, bustling world filled with shuffling denizens and buzzing police probes. *Emergence* is far more basic than that, but then again, so is just about every other FPS on the market. *SiN*'s true merits lie in its combat, powered by a dynamically

scalable difficulty monitor that tailors the action to your ability as you play.

Gun down ten enemies with headshots and you find yourself facing a legion of heavily-armed, thickly armoured enemies in the next room. Take a beating and the game will be far more forgiving once you move on to the next location.

It's a system that works surprisingly well and ensures that the game is always challenging. Make no mistake, this isn't a *Doom 3* clone where you can simply charge around each level blazing away as enemies chase you down a corridor. Neither is it a fragfest of *Quake*-proportions. *Emergence* proves a far more considered affair, and as a result, it's way more challenging than the majority of shooters you've played. If you want to be a gung-ho hero, then you'd be better off looking somewhere else.

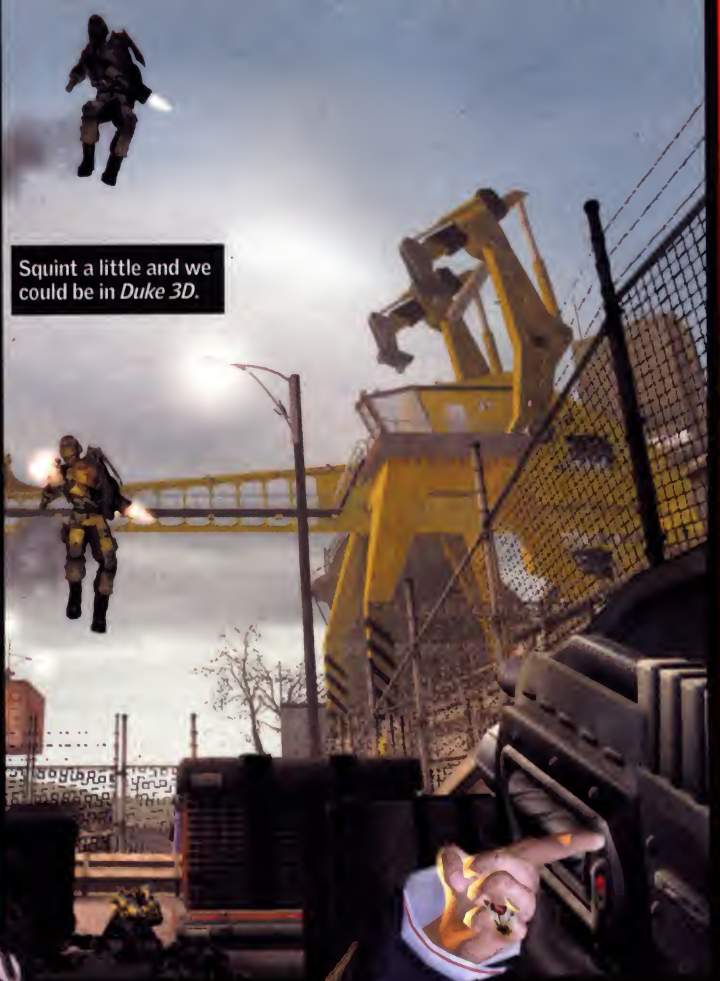
Of course, this extra level of challenge means you have to play smart. Finding cover, strafing, pulling off pinpoint headshots and intelligently using your surroundings are all essential skills to master if you want to stand a chance of



Si/W adds stats to your shootery with great aplomb.



"And look menacing... Now!"



Squint a little and we could be in *Duke 3D*.

This is no *Doom 3* clone, nor is it a fragfest of *Quake* proportions – *Emergence* is an altogether more considered affair

making it through to *Episode 2*, as you'll soon find that *Emergence's* enemies are every bit as savvy as you are. Aim at their heads and they duck, hide and flush you out with grenades; charge at them and they retreat. Plus, if they aren't armed – like the clawed mutations you come across later on – they kick and hurl objects at you, before moving in close to rake out your eyes.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

With action this challenging, it might come as a relief to know that you don't always have to work alone. Fighting by your side throughout the course of several levels is Jessica Cannon, a gun-loving tomboy who strangely, also seems to be indestructible.

Personally, I've never been a huge fan of the immortal sidekick mechanic, but given the episodic nature of the game, it's hard to see how else Ritual could have included her – other than taking her out of the equation altogether, which clearly wasn't an option.

Despite this, fighting by her side is still plenty of fun, and while you can sometimes allow yourself to sit



The Sound Of Music

Can you hear it, can you hear it, can you hear it?



The music man: Zak Belica.

Music and sound effects often get overlooked in games. Strange really, as if you've ever tried playing a game without any sound, you'd soon realise just how important a role it plays. *Emergence's* soundtrack is particularly impressive thanks to the work of veteran audio director Zak Belica. Mixing subtle themes with some truly catchy tunes, Belica has managed to inject a genuine aural rollercoaster ride into the game. "A game's music serves much of the same purpose as film music – to lend emotional impact to scenes and situations that the player might not otherwise perceive," he explains.

"With this idea in mind, I created a set of strong character and location themes, and made versions of these themes to underscore moods such as 'confrontation' and 'action pursuit'. The use of strong themes also helps the player identify what they're dealing with in the game. So, when the player hears a fast-paced action piece melded with Elexis's theme, they know, 'I'm in Elexis's territory and she's not happy I'm here'."

Belica has succeeded admirably in pulling all of this off, and the result is one of the best and most fitting musical scores we've heard in quite some time.



You Are What You Eat re-runs are just getting dull now...



Good balaclava, bad aim.



Miles Mayhem makes a cameo appearance in *Switchblade*.

back while she takes care of business, you still feel fairly challenged whenever she's backing you up.

BA-DA-BOOM!

Another criticism that we touched upon in our preview back in issue 167 was the game's predominance of exploding barrels. It never ceases to amaze me that almost 15 years after the release of *Doom*, developers still insist on cramming their shooters with giant cans of gasoline that just happen to be sitting right next to pockets of enemy resistance. *Emergence* is by no means alone in this, and it's testament to just how little the genre has evolved that exploding canisters still inhabit the majority of FPS games.

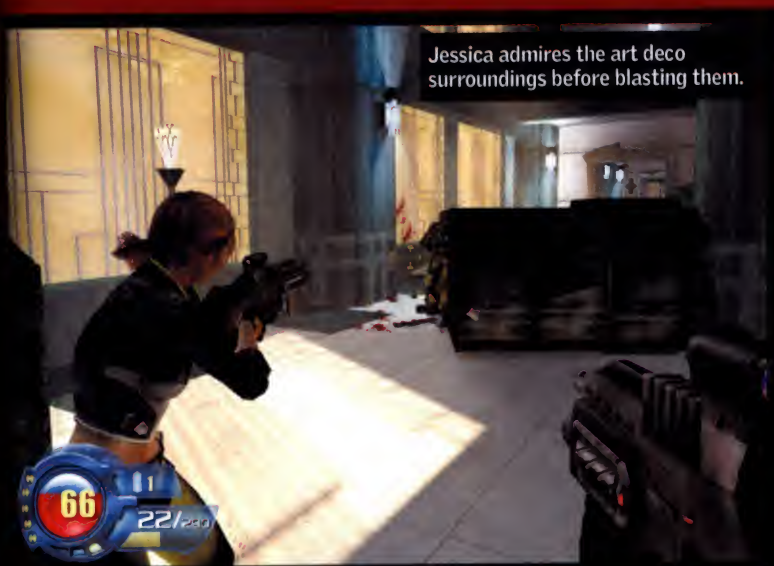
Thankfully, not every barrel in *Emergence* is an exploding cliché. Dotted around each level are Mutagen-filled cylinders – giant cans of noxious gas that when shot, spew out green vapour that suffocates humans and, better still, places you into a form of bullet-time.

Here at last we have a barrel trick with a touch of imagination, an idea that expands the age-old staple of the genre and embellishes the gameplay with a novel twist. Diving into a cluster of gagging enemies then blasting them away in slow-motion is a joy to behold.

What's more, thanks to the Source engine's magnificent physics capabilities, you can even hurl these containers into rooms of enemies, then shoot them and watch as your foes charge around, gasping for breath, before asphyxiating. Oh, and let's not forget the fact that for some reason, this Mutagen doesn't kill you, but rather enhances your powers. Why? Well, that's something you're just going to have to find out for yourself.

BURNING UP, BABY

There are plenty of other strengths here, too. Wall-mounted medical machines that replenish your health and often require you to track down refills before you can bring



Jessica admires the art deco surroundings before blasting them.



However pleasant they may seem, these breasts are, in fact, evil.

yourself back to full health. Three weapons (pistol, shotgun and assault rifle) that feel like six thanks to some excellent secondary fire functions. What's more, there's the ability to move in close and hammer your opponents to death with melee attacks should your ammo supplies run dry.

Then there's the perfect lip-synching and convincing facial emotions conveyed by each character you meet. Plus, there are also some truly humongous bosses, who aren't just harder than a concrete covered gumball but hugely manoeuvrable too, relentlessly charging at you and throwing you around the level like a ragdoll as they butt you with their hideous bonces.

RISKY BUSINESS

Best of all though is the game's climactic finalé, which sees you and Jessica launching a daring skyscraper raid against *Emergence's* chief bad guy (one of Elexis's partners in crime called Radek), where the intensity of the firefights escalate with

In The Red Corner

A quick rundown of some of the meatier enemies you'll be meeting in *SiN Episodes: Emergence*



SINTEK CHAINGUNNER

One of SinTEK's elite warriors, the Chaingunner packs a considerable punch, wielding a devastating high-rate firing mini-gun and protected by thick armour. They're pretty slow though, what with lugging around several skips-worth of metal, so with some fancy footwork you can outmanoeuvre them, then fill them with bullets. Remember, the better you are the better the bad guys – although playing dumb rarely works as a tactic.



AERIAL MOBILE UNITS

Nippy and hard to hit, these flying killers buzz around the skies on jetpacks, weaving in and out of sight to unleash a salvo before ducking back to safety. While they might be hard to target, a direct hit on their jetpacks will soon see them spiralling to their deaths – a cool trick we haven't seen since *Republic Commando*. Hooray for jetpacks that go haywire when they're broken!



RECOMBINANT

These primitive mutants come in two different guises. The first is small and agile, using a projectile attack to sap you of energy, while its larger, more dangerous cousin uses its immense strength to throw and kick objects at you and tear you up with its claws. Further evidence that forced genetic mutation can never be anything but a bad thing, unless it's doing something useful like growing ears on mice.

every floor you climb. It's also here that the game's physics truly come into their own as offices and electrical equipment are literally torn to shreds as you exchange volleys with ever greater numbers of enemies.

There's little doubt that *Emergence* is a game of genuine quality, a shooter that'll stretch your trigger skills to their limits while entertaining you with a tantalising plot that gives just about enough away to hook you and reel you into *Episode 2*. Had it been a full price game, then perhaps *Emergence* would have been a borderline Recommended, but given its minuscule price tag, it's a bit of a steal.

While it may not be the most ground-breaking of shooters, *Emergence's* merits far outweigh its smattering of faults, and with six to ten hours of entertainment to be had, you can't argue that it's not value for money, especially as it also comes bundled with a copy of the original *SiN*. Eleven quid you say? Bargain.

PCZONE

Graphics Superb, Source engine-driven goodness

Sound Brilliant musical score and some meaty effects

Multiplayer Zilch

- ✓ Extremely challenging
- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ Intriguing plot
- ✓ Excellent soundtrack
- ✗ A few too many old school FPS mechanics
- ✗ Doesn't make the most of the Source engine

83

Cheap as chips and just as tasty



BONE: THE GREAT COW RACE

Beyond Boneville and into bovine...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$12.99 (£8)
System requirements ①



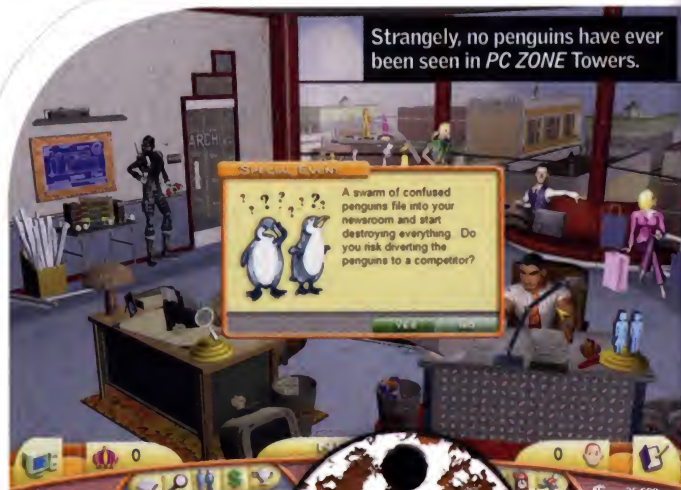
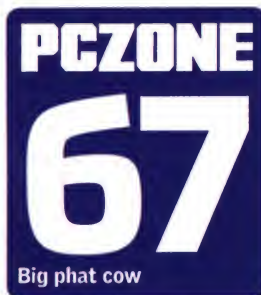
A GAME THAT competently evokes the cosiness of watching *Time Team* of a Sunday evening, eating heavily-buttered toast and safe in the knowledge that you've done all your homework – *The Great Cow Race* isn't a masterpiece, but it is a thoroughly amiable outing for he of the nubbin-nose. Opening with the beautifully self-referential line: "Well the last one was fun, but short..." in reference as much to last year's cow race as *Out Of Boneville* itself – what follows is a far more streamlined and engaging sophomore effort from the gang at Telltale.

The lead characters lubricate the game with an ounce of judiciously spread charm, allowing the game to amble along without drawing too much attention to its occasional

failings. While our hero, the intensely lovable Fone Bone, is busy trying to point-and-click his way into the heart of orphan-girl Thorn by proving his manliness, grumpy brother Phoney Bone is trying to convince punters to bet on his own 'Mystery Cow' – the suit for which is being created by eccentric songstrel brother Smiley Bone using a hat that looks like an udder.

A few of the mini-games still grate, conversations occasionally demand mindless clicking until you discover a verbal sweetspot and the supporting cast aren't half as interesting as those of LucasArts of yore. Overall though, this is a cheaper, slightly longer and certainly more rewarding slice of saccharine silliness than before. Still not perfect, but very, very cute.

Will Porter



TABLOID TYCOON

The stench of the gutter

DEVELOPER Black Lantern
PUBLISHER GSP
WEBSITE www.gsp.cc
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99
System requirements ①



LET'S NOT WASTE time; this game is a regrettable flume of hot, stinking brown.

First, the 'Tycoon' aspect of the title is largely limited to 'assigning staff to stories'. To do this, you look at a load of numbers, five times an issue, for up to 250 issues. Sound immeasurably tedious? Then I'm beginning to make my point. Diversions from this ferocious, corrosive boredom come in the form of law suits and special events, which pop up in a special reduced-fun text box format.

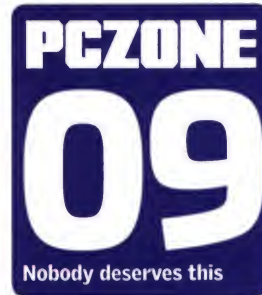
I was told I had penguins in my office. I was asked if I wanted to send the penguins to a competitor. I said yes, and was fined \$10,000 by city hall. This is the kind of wacky nut-rinse to which you must learn to numb yourself, if you're

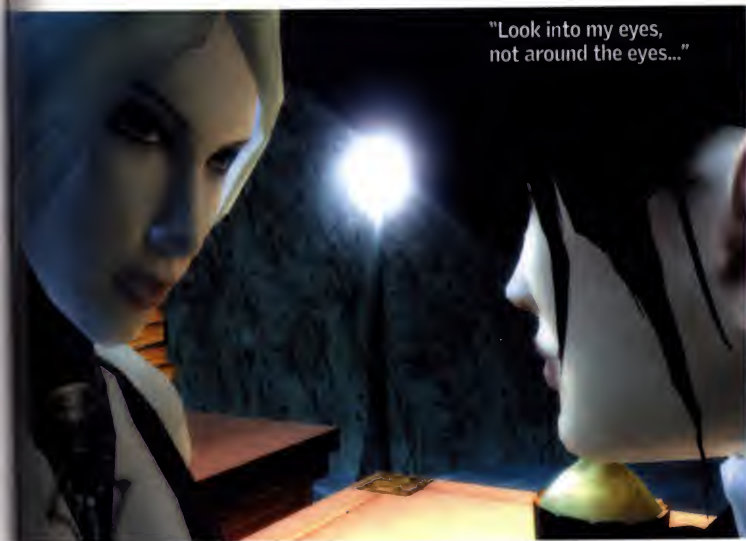
moronic enough to get out your stick and prod this wretched turd of a game.

But there's another side to *Tabloid Tycoon* – you can write stories of your own. At one time in history – say, before anyone with a brain stem could sign up for a free blog – this might have veered towards being interesting. However, getting to see your newspaper is as fault-laden a process as you could imagine. It's a grotesquely unintuitive process, there are broken image links in the HTML output, and the game randomly closes down while you're playing.

To recreate the experience of playing this game, simply think of the hopeless state of our planet's ecology, think of mankind's limitless capacity for evil, and cry for 36 hours.

Jon Blyth





DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Dan Marshall dreams of electric sheep. Every. Single. Night

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
WEBSITE
www.dreamfall.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

THE VERY EPITOME of the snazzy adventure sequel, *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey* is bigger and better, yet somehow exactly the same adventure. Sadly, this includes sharing the same faults that probably stopped the original from bothering your hard drive.

The main draw is the story: a winding, enjoyable romp, falling squarely into 'sci-fi novel' territory. It's a complete melodrama, looking like *The Sims* crossed with *Sunset Beach*. In the future.

GOOD COP, BAD COP

However, there's an odd duality at work throughout: the graphics flit between looking gorgeous and downright awful. There's decent acting in places, yet some characters sound like some smack addicts have just been dragged off the street into a recording studio. At times the script dazzles, at others it's little more than a

succession of cheesy lines: "I have seen it... With my eyes." Brief moments of excitement are staggered by long periods of drudgery, inane conversations and terrible combat.

Just when things start to look up for *Dreamfall*, something awful happens and it plummets right back down. So, fleeting moments of high drama and intrigue, such as snooping around a druggy-addled boarding house or a creepy *F.E.A.R.*-esque little girl with long black hair giving you messages from beyond the grave are either followed by long, dreary conversations about how everybody's feeling or awkward, fumbling combat. All of which will have you nibbling the edges of your monitor in frustration...

What's more, there aren't really any puzzles to speak of: there are never more than a handful of items in your inventory, or more than a single location to explore at a time. This means *Dreamfall* never taxes the brain, and progression is more

often than not a case of running to the next location and having a bit of a chat.

In this way, interaction never feels more than completely superfluous, and as a result, you don't really play *Dreamfall* – you watch it. With the story as its only saving grace, it's not so much an adventure game as a conversation 'em up; and unfortunately, that's exactly as exciting as it sounds... **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Adventure game sequel that picks up where *The Longest Journey* left off... albeit in new, swishy 3D.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

FAHRENHEIT 90%

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON 75%

DREAMFALL 67%



PCZONE

Graphics Sometimes great, sometimes terrible
 Sound Awesome music, offset by some lousy acting
 Multiplayer Nil point

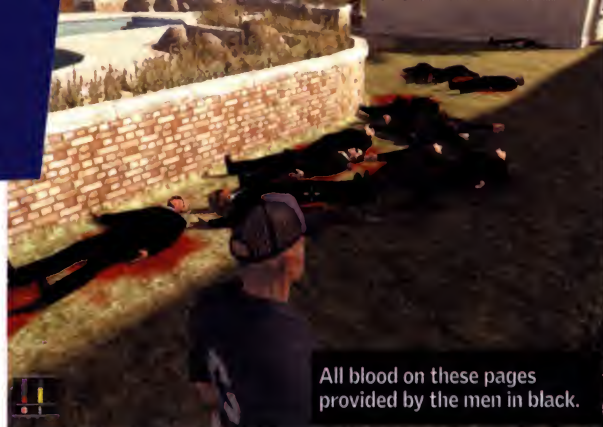
- ✓ Varied locations
- ✓ Plenty of story
- ✓ Full of Irish people! Bejaysus!
- ✗ Minimal interaction on your part
- ✗ Dire combat sections

67

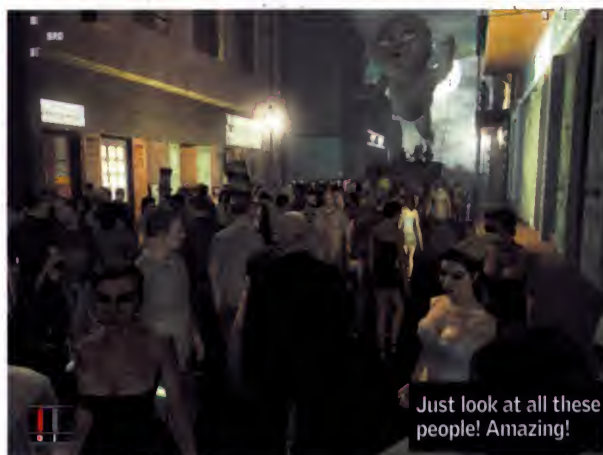
Look but don't touch



Satan represents rock music, the dead guys represent some disillusioned youths.



All blood on these pages provided by the men in black.



Just look at all these people! Amazing!

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Suzy Wallace likes it silent but violent

DEVELOPER Io Interactive
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.hitmanbloodmoney.com
ETA May 26
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The bald-headed assassin returns, with the emphasis on stealth and the ability to rig people's deaths to look like accidents.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY 91%

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY 84%

HITMAN: CONTRACTS 72%

SITTING ON THE 8:41 train on my way into work, I glance over at the teenager who ruins my otherwise peaceful journey every morning. His particular favoured brand of obnoxious grunge music blares so loudly from his headphones that people in the neighbouring carriages are in danger of getting tinnitus. Every day for the last couple of months, I've responded to the situation by calmly turning up the volume on my iPod and concentrating on the scenery rushing by, but today my thoughts turn to darker avenues. If I could just follow him home, mug a passing electrician for his clothes, pose as a meter reader to get into his house, rig his CD player with tiny microwave chips and his earphones with a specially conductive material, then the next time he turns up the volume on the train, the resultant sparks will travel along the headphone wire and take him out without anyone being any the wiser.

My new habit of plotting people's deaths via supremely inventive 'accidents' is all thanks to Io Interactive's fourth outing for slap-headed assassin, Code 47. Far from *Contracts*, where you could happily blast your way through any opposition without

fear of consequences, *Blood Money* has put the emphasis right back on melting into the shadows again.

THE PRICE OF FAME

It's achieved this via the clever use of the titular blood money and the notoriety system. While each hit grants you a fee, if you should manage to complete it without anyone noticing your presence, this cash sum will be increased. However, get your bald mug on camera, leave corpses out in the open or just leave plenty of witnesses in your wake and you'll soon find your notoriety rising. Finish a level and the next day's papers will report on the deaths (featuring such information as your favourite weapon, number of people killed, accuracy and more), and may even feature an appropriately accurate photofit of who the police are now looking for.

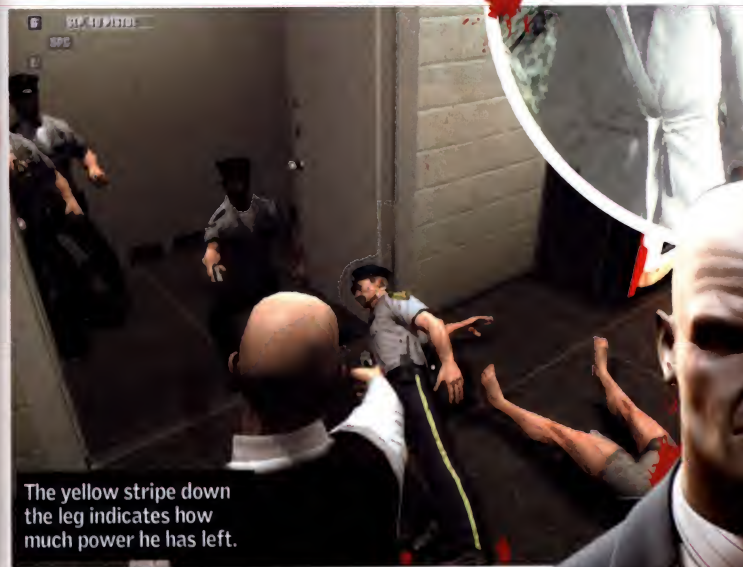
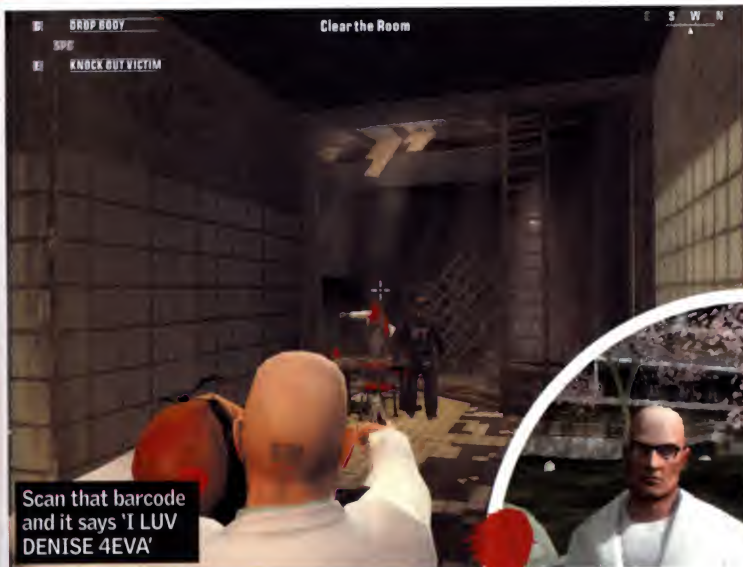
It's a novel way to present the information and one that works extremely well, allowing you to review your mission progress by way of something that's easy to digest and fun to read. Should your notoriety level get too high, you can choose to spend some of your hard-earned cash on bribes to lower it. Don't do this and your face becomes increasingly recognisable, thus making further levels even harder to pull off

without everyone running screaming from you at first sight. Money can also be spent on a series of weapons upgrades; which give yet another incentive to keep your head down. It's a streamlined system that once again places the emphasis exactly where it needs to be: on stealth.

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Now that sneakiness is again a priority, Io have introduced 'accidental' deaths to help you fulfil your contracts without a trace. These unfailingly inventive and often hilarious ways to bump off your targets range from rigging someone's barbecue with lighter fluid, to dropping a suspended piano on their heads – but by far our favourite 'accident' is rigging a pyrotechnics display used by a dancer in a club.

When the dancer comes out, the flames set her on fire and she rolls over until dropping straight into the shark tank below, where one of the oversized fishes promptly gobbles up its impromptu meal. It's completely twisted yet utterly brilliant and brings a whole new dimension to the game. Finding out just how to pull a complicated accident off effectively can take hours of observation, but once you've seen one target pop their clogs without anyone even suspecting you, it soon becomes quite



addictive and you'll find yourself resorting to weapons less and less.

THREE'S A CROWD

Where *Blood Money* really shines is in Io Interactive's amazingly inventive level design. Gone are the drab confines of *Contract*'s levels, to be replaced with gaudy and flamboyant levels bursting with colour and activity, from casinos through heaven- and hell-themed nightclubs to Mardi Gras festivals. The latter two levels deserve a special mention as both feature literally hundreds upon hundreds of extras, giving 47 a potential wardrobe choice equal to Paris Hilton. It may not be the most graphically intense game on PC, but the very locations themselves still have a definite wow factor. Each level is well laid out with many different areas, checkpoints and guards that should keep your killer instinct in good shape working out how to avoid being spotted.

Playing the role of hired killer is now more joy than chore thanks to the new moves that 47's picked up. He can turn weapons upon their owners, use human shields, push people over



Santa's Little Helper

At a Christmas party full of semi-naked women, what better way to make friends than to dress up as Santa?



At the far end lies the entrance to the grotto (and the girls), but it's only open to staff and those with a special pass.



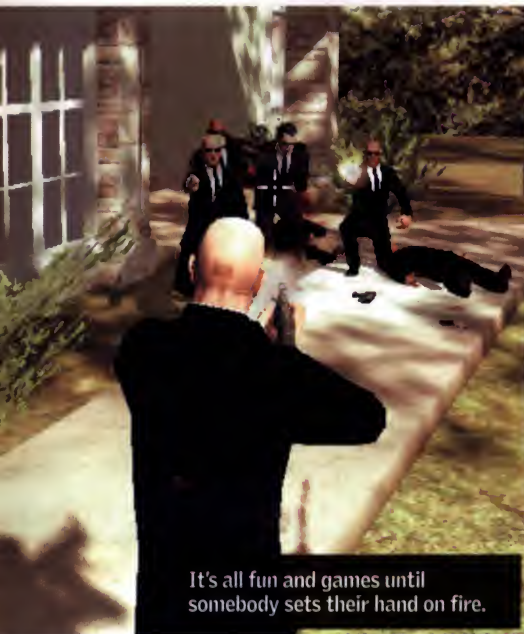
Looks like Santa's had a bit too much sherry. Mind you, his costume could be just the trick for getting us into the grotto.



Following the inebriated and similarly sized Mr Claus into the kitchen, I give him a swift konk to the head before stealing his outfit.



Strolling casually into the grotto, I talk to the photographer who's taking pictures of the girls. A new plan starts to form...

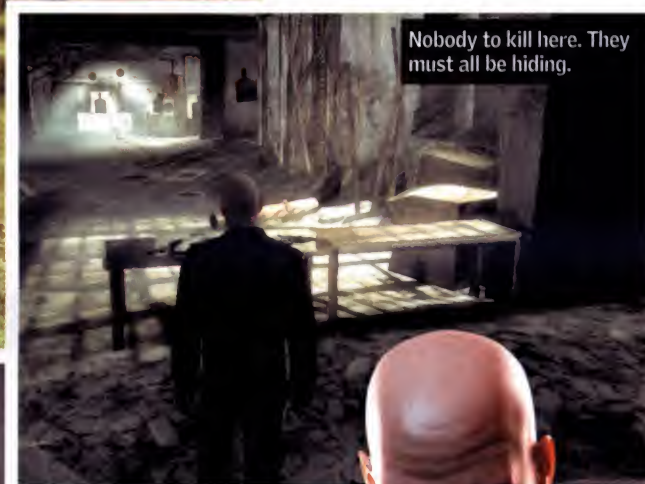


It's all fun and games until somebody sets their hand on fire.



ledges and stash bodies to make them harder to find. Put together, these new features cause the game to flow more naturally than its predecessors and really make it a joy to play.

The only niggles are that of the traditional but unwieldy inventory, and the context-based button presses which can often find you swapping outfits when you really wanted to haul the dead body away.



Nobody to kill here. They must all be hiding.



Agent 47's ability to undress corpses so quickly is never explained.

They're minor complaints, but right in the thick of things, choosing the wrong option can mean the difference between life and death. Enemy AI has also received a boost and with guards following blood trails, talking on their radios and searching you for weapons when entering restricted areas, it's harder than ever to get away with murder.

While the training level in an abandoned funfair is a fantastic introduction, there's still a pretty steep learning curve to be crossed when you head over to the first proper level. We reckon it's one of the most unforgiving in the game, but don't let that put you off, as you'll soon settle into your assumed assassin role. With its amazing sets, inventive ways of killing, solid storyline with a great twist at the end and more emphasis on stealth, 47's latest is not only the most accomplished *Hitman* title ever, but a serious contender in the world of stealth gaming. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Glorious locations and colourful characters
Sound A rousing score and solid voice-acting
Multiplayer Nope, just contract killing for one

- ✓ Inventive level design
- ✓ Brilliant accidental deaths
- ✓ Incentives to stay stealthy
- ✓ Open-ended gameplay
- ✗ Steep learning curve on first level
- ✗ Controls can be tricky to get to grips with

84

Near-perfect execution



This is how it really looks.

Free kicks are poor, especially by Australians.



Beckham



It could happen. No, really...

2006 FIFA WORLD CUP

Steve Hill makes a late bid to replace Rooney this summer...

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.ea.com/2006FIFAWorldCup
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

IS THIS THE most pointless review of the year? The game is already out; the chavs have predictably lapped it up in their droves, while the *Pro Evolution* purists sit back tutting in disapproval. So who's wrong? No-one, really. As a so-called 'event product', *2006 FIFA World Cup* is unsurpassed, essentially providing a living, breathing Panini sticker album. Such is the atmosphere created, it's almost like being there – sat on your arse in front of ITV, that is, with a spookily realistic commentary from Clive Tyldesley, and the witless mutterings of Andy Townsend.

As you'd expect, all the correct stadia, teams and obligatory licenses are in place, enabling you to literally play out the World Cup – including optional qualifiers – from the safety of your PC, once you've gone through the necessary hassle of setting up

a PS2 joystick or equivalent. So is it worth the grief? The number at the foot of the page would suggest so, and this does represent a marked improvement on previous *FIFA* instalments, with enhanced animation and speed, for instance.

COMPLETE CONTROL

In a clear nod to its closest rival, control-wise you're presented with a slightly woolly version of *Pro Evo*, although in time some subtleties do become apparent. With slide tackles seemingly outlawed, much of the game is spent harrying the man on the ball, with spellbinding football at a premium. There's an over-reliance on the through ball – and consequently a lot of off-sides – but with practice, a variety of goals can be scored, although it would be nice if the midfield chipped in occasionally. As for the best players, they're recognisable by having a star over their heads, although they do allegedly possess individual skills.

While it's never going to match *PES* on the pitch, the authenticity does genuinely make a difference. If you play this enough, by the time the real thing comes around you should have gleaned enough information to be able to bore for England. And for 20 quid, it's probably better value than sticking a St George's cross on the aerial of your white van. **PCZ**



AT A GLANCE...

To the surprise of no-one, EA knocks out another number one. While no cup-winner, it's just about worthy of your attention.

System requirements **2**

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 **93%**

2006 FIFA WORLD CUP: **78%**

FIFA '06 **77%**



Swing it in, Becks.

PCZONE

Graphics No great advance on previous versions
Sound Superb commentary, excellent crowd effects
Multiplayer Online a bit hit-and-miss

- ✓ Extremely authentic
- ✓ Superb commentary
- ✓ Genuinely atmospheric
- ✗ Poor tackling
- ✗ A console game
- ✗ Not as good as *PES*

78
England's dreaming



CITY LIFE

Andy Robinson causes cultural tension

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo
PUBLISHER Monte Cristo
WEBSITE
www.montecristogames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Monte Cristo takes a stab at the city-building genre with *City Life*, a game where road construction is the least of your worries once the hillbillies and businessmen start a riot.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

SIMCITY 4 92%

CITY LIFE 73%

TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK 70%

I'VE GOT MANY complaints about my home town: the trains are slow, there are too many pensioners and you can never find an open kebab shop when you need one. Things would be different if I ran the place – Indian takeaways would be open all hours and friendly tramps would dance for hours in exchange for a shiny nickel. Obviously, this is where *City Life* comes in.

At first glance it doesn't look much different from your average sim game. From the start you're dropped on an empty stretch of real-estate, tasked with liberally scattering roads and houses until a bustling city rises from the ashes. The interface is simple but satisfyingly functional; all side-bars can be swiftly hidden and city stats are easily popped up with the click of a button.

But this isn't just *SimCity* with a new flowery dress. Monte Cristo's effort – as well as offering all the real estate construction and stat management present in Maxis's effort – throws an important twist into the city sim cocktail.

In *City Life*, citizens fall in to one of six social classes, ranging from gas-pumping blue collars to limousine-cruising suits. Sadly, chavs aren't available in the retail game, although we're sure someone's already working on the mod.

This feature puts a large twist on the tired *SimCity* formula, and kept us amused in what would otherwise be a fairly by-the-numbers sim game. Zoning neighbourhoods becomes essential to creating a successful city, while catering for their different needs is also crucial. For example, blue collars infinitely prefer a country bar to a family restaurant found in a fringe neighbourhood, and vice-versa.

STREET LIFE

Sadly, *City Life*'s triumphs end after a few hefty play sessions. The *Theme Park*-style selection of terrain maps kept us occupied for a while, but due to the relatively short time it takes to expand into an end-game metropolis, we quickly sped through the 22 available. Combine this with non-existent terrain controls and

a number of statistical omissions, and *City Life* falls a little short of the bar set by the likes of *SimCity 4*. Still, we enjoyed dropping aristocrats in the middle of a hillbilly neighbourhood. **PC4**

PCZONE

Graphics Dated but functional
 Sound Relaxing porno music
 Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Social class system works well
- ✓ Excellent interface
- ✓ Fun while it lasts
- ✗ Fairly easy
- ✗ Single-player content doesn't last long

73
 Street



PIPPA FUNNELL: TAKE THE REINS

Flogging a nearly dead horse



DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.pippafunnellgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1

YOU CAN TELL a game's going to be dire when the publisher refuses to send you a copy: *Pippa Funnell's* second outing on PC is just such an example. You play as a young girl who's been sent to a posh horsey college, where your arrival is welcomed with a dodgy cut-scene akin to a *Harry Potter* movie, but without any of the characters, settings or magic that makes that series entertaining.

Once you've settled in, the game revolves around filling your day with four activities. These mostly fall into two camps: teeth-gnashingly bad adventure-style proceedings with dated 3D environments and a bunch of annoying teenagers who look like they've just been sacked from a low-budget teen horror flick; and actual horse-based content such as grooming your horse, practising one of the



events on offer and shovelling shit. While the riding events provide simple entertainment, the other tasks are so tedious and repetitive, you soon find yourself wondering if you could make a profit from turning your precious nag into Pedigree Chum and Superglue.

The game also squeezes in other girly content of dubious value such as taking photos, buying clothes and making yourself more popular, thus providing extra squealing content for the young lady of today without adding anything to the gameplay.

If you're looking to buy a present for a daughter or niece, you're much better off with *Beyond Good & Evil* or *Psychonauts*. Or you could just cough up the cash for an iPod Nano. After all, I bet the *Bratz* have one.

Suzy Wallace



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MAGIC. THE NEXT
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AND BIG HUGE GAMES.



RISE OF NATIONS
RISE OF LEGENDS



Microsoft
game studios

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GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

Steve Hill embarks on the second chapter of the MMORPG it's OK to play

DEVELOPER ArenaNet
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE
www.guildwars.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The *Guild Wars* phenomenon continues, with a new setting and story to goblin-fanciers everywhere.

System requirements **3**

HOW IT STACKS

EVERQUEST II **95%**

GUILD WARS: PROPHECIES **94%**

GUILD WARS: FACTIONS **78%**

YOU HAVE BEEN playing for five hours. Please take a break.' When a game casually informs you that you've just spunked 300 minutes of your life wandering round a fantasy world, it must be doing something right. Or indeed wrong.

Aficionados of the original *Guild Wars* – now known as *Prophecies* – will be aware that it's the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game that you can eat between other games without ruining your appetite. Dispensing with the levelling-up trudge of killing small animals, it's an action-packed affair that you can play in short, controlled bursts without any negative impact on your character. And crucially, there's no subscription fee.



Factions is of course Chapter Two (of several planned) and is available either as a 'standalone product' or as an upgrade to your already installed *Guild Wars*. There's only one game client, so my *Factions* character now sits alongside those from *Prophecies* in the menu. Of the two new classes available, the Assassin is a swift and deadly killer – with minimal armour – and the Ritualist is able to summon up an array of spirits at the drop of a wand.

EAST IS EAST

Ultimately though, it's more of the same, albeit with a new storyline and exotic new setting. With a distinctly Oriental flavour, the visuals genuinely are a joy to behold, and you will occasionally find yourself stopping to take in a sweeping vista, before continuing with whatever errand you're currently running.

Which is essentially what the game boils down to: team up with a few likely sorts and head out into the wide beyond to slaughter monsters, escort envoys, deliver packages or whatever job the powers that be foist upon you. On paper, it might not sound the most thrilling of

game experiences, but as the five hours expended appears to confirm, it is mildly compelling, with an unfiddly interface that even the most RPG-phobic clown should be able to manage. Did I say five hours? Make that 15... **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Among the best available
Sound Unobtrusive music, limited chat
Multiplayer If anyone will team up with you

- ✓ No subscription fee
- ✓ No rat killing
- ✓ Accessible interface
- ✗ More of the same
- ✗ Tricky difficulty curve
- ✗ It's ultimately pointless

78

Guild mores



CSI: 3 DIMENSIONS OF MURDER

Unless it's a paper cut

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1

THIS IS THE fourth *CSI* game, but it's the first time Telltale (makers of the *Sam & Max* and *Bone* games) have rolled out the corpses. They've done predictably well, but it's a format that defies reinvention, so despite the graphical improvements, you're playing the same game: search scenes for evidence, take evidence to lab, get search warrants, rinse, repeat, solve.

It's hardly poetic stuff – shall I compare thee to a semen swab? – but the script's good, it's well acted by the show's stars and you zoom into clues with a white flash just like the proper police. Crime trivia – before forensic technology, there was no such white flash – policemen would just say: "Jinkies! A clue!"

The problem, as ever, is that everything's there for you.



Interrogation is just a matter of exhausting all the options. There are false leads and dead-end clues, but to get Master ranking you're going to have to collect them all and cross-reference them anyway.

Setting the difficulty high reduces the amount of visual clues you get; mouse cursors, appropriate tools and a tag that shows when the evidence has been used as much as it can be. With easy mode, you'll spend less time clicking on inactive areas and choosing the wrong blood-revealing spray.

It's very good at what it's doing, but the problem is that's very limited. This is a point-and-click adventure from the people bringing you the next *Sam & Max*, for people who think *Sam & Max* is too funny, difficult and lacking in meth-fuelled murders.

Jon Blyth



Magic versus technology.
 The next evolution
 of RTS gaming from
 Brian Reynolds and
 Big Huge Games.



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FIRE DEPARTMENT 3

Fire in the disco! And on your hard drive!

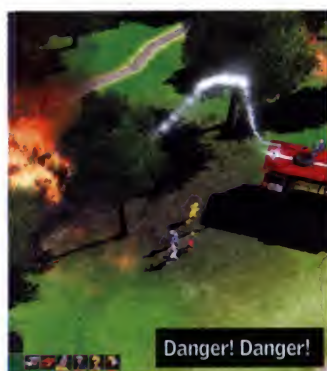
DEVELOPER Monte Cristo
PUBLISHER Monte Cristo
WEBSITE www.montecristogames.com/fire-department-3
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements ②

FIRE: THE UNTAMED element. Oldest of man's mysteries. Giver of warmth. Destroyer of forests, right now *this* building is on fire! Leave the building! Enact the age old drama of self-preservation! And allow us, the 3D strategic fire departments of no less than five countries of the world to save you!

Or, if we switch off the *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* quote box for a second – allow a diabolical map and camera system to lose your tiny firemen in the raging inferno and let everyone die – to great infuriation.

A shame, since beating deep within *Fire Department 3* is a fun and original game – let down by some hazy mission objectives and firemen who'll happily stand in a well-hosed bookshop leafing through a damp copy of *Fahrenheit 451*, while a minute down the road a shopping arcade ceiling is about to melt.



There's fun too though – mainly because you're kept on your toes since one thing the game does well is emphasise the random nature of out-of-control blazes. Each mission has sub-objectives that pop up when you're least expecting them, and while you're frantically trying to keep the flames at bay, there are many members of the public you need to save with your happy band of paramedics.

Ultimately though, the 'game harshness' to 'unit baby-sitting' ratio is a bit skewiff, and the map and camera make affairs hard to keep track of.

Fire Department 3 is fun, but flawed. And a bit on fire too.

Will Porter



PCZONE

63

Feeling hot hot hot



MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED

I'll have a vowel please Carol

DEVELOPER Rainbow Studios
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE www.thq.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

System requirements ①

PLAYING THIS GAME, I've discovered that there's something very pure and enjoyable about going up hills on a bike really fast. Of course, I knew that going down hills on bikes was really fun from the time I ended up in a park ditch with my mountain bike on top of me. So with an arsenal of tracks rammed full of jumps and exaggerated physics, *MX Vs. ATV Unleashed* has managed to keep me entertained.

Unsurprisingly, *Unleashed* has you racing everything from MX bikes to turbo-charged golf-carts around tracks with more bumps than Mike Tyson's forehead. This style of racing game doesn't lend itself fantastically to a keyboard, but once you crack out a decent joystick you're riding with the best of them.

The single-player game is a comfortable and mostly enjoyable and speed-infused affair, but



unfortunately it suffers from being far too easy on anything other than the highest difficulty setting. In addition, some of the later vehicles are incredibly frustrating to manoeuvre.

The track editor makes up for it though – it's fantastic. It's easy enough for anybody to use and the results can be incredibly satisfying – or in our case, frightfully broken.

So who wins in the epic war between MX Bikes and ATVs? Well, seeing as the later can send the former flying 100 yards into a cactus field with the slightest of nudges, the unsportsmanlike of us crown ATV the champion. Cakes and drinks are in the foyer.

Andy Robinson



PCZONE

68

On track

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Oh, zombie monkey just got served!

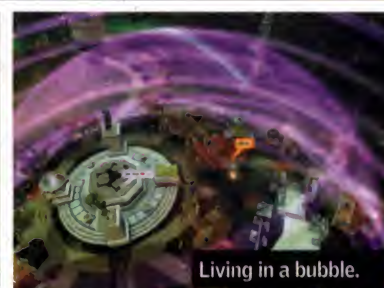


The Aztecs go through that troublesome Goth phase...

BLACK & WHITE 2: BATTLE OF THE GODS



Aw, his fur's all wet. Bless.



Living in a bubble.

Ye gods! *Steve Hogarty* gets heretical...

DEVELOPER Lionhead
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.lionhead.com/botg/
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

Man versus skeleton. Monkey versus zombie. A world where scrapping gods have turned common sense on its head! Zombie monkey!

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS 91%

BLACK & WHITE: CREATURE ISLE 85%

BLACK & WHITE 2: BATTLE OF THE GODS 70%

RIGHT, YOU, BACK there. Yes, you Mister Giggles, do you have something you'd like to share with the rest of us? What? You think I was wrong about *Black & White 2*? Well I'm glad you said that because it just so happens that I have here in my pocket a bulleted list of reasons outlining why I was right all along. Bullet point one...

Actually, forget the bullet points – *Black & White 2* is outstanding for four reasons: it's different, it's beautiful, it's breathtaking and it's compelling. Of course there are flaws, just like the Mona Lisa has a wonky horizon and lots of tiny cracks in the paint and whatnot, but the day an artwork is debased by a broken frame or a fantastic game by some cumbersome RTS aspects, is the day I stop preparing my bulleted rebuttals in advance.

THE UNDEADENING

Battle Of The Gods improves the original game's RTS facet by some undeterminable multiple. Pitching you against a new and aggressive rival god, the expansion is

clearly focused on combat between your Greek armies and your enemy's undead skeletal warriors. The unit AI, it is claimed, has been improved, but it's barely perceptible (if there at all). No, the real improvements come by way of the expansion's islands, which were specifically designed to be strategically fun to play.

Example: the first island sees you racing to improve your city and expand your boundary of influence enough to place some decent fortifications and man them with archers, especially important as your new foe will attack relentlessly. Worth noting is the inclusion of a giant zombie monkey creature, which will no doubt have all you naysayers standing to attention. That's right, a zombie frickin' monkey. Lionhead didn't miss a trick here.

However, old gripes remain, only to be pronounced by the expansion's newfound RTS direction. Troops won't go where you want, selecting targets is awkward and combat is visually unexciting when no creature is involved. There's little content

on offer here either, with only three islands and four new miracles making this hardly an essential purchase. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics We'd forgotten how pretty it looks
Sound We'd forgotten how pretty it sounds
Multiplayer Oh yeah, whatever happened to it?

- ✓ Undead army is very cool
- ✓ Zombie monkey
- ✓ Excellently designed maps
- ✓ Cheap
- ✗ Not a lot of content
- ✗ RTS problems remain

70
A shade of grey

IGUK

Frag Lotto

There are many computer gaming tournaments being run each year, some of them with vast sums of prize money on offer to the winners. But how many people really stand a chance in this hardcore world of pro-gaming? The unfortunate answer is not many, only a handful in the pro-gaming community have a look-in on prize money and any casual gamer may as well not turn up. Computer games are made to be participated in, not watched from the sidelines.

The Frag Lotto is a marked departure from normal tournaments that reward only the very elite, and offer no excitement to the casual player. Rather than basing all prizes on a standard knockout bracket, players in a Frag Lotto tournament earn tickets. The number of tickets each player earns is based on how well they do in their games. While the very best players earn larger numbers of tickets for doing well in the competition, players who do not do so well also earn a smaller number of tickets based on their performance. These tickets are all placed into the grand draw at the end of the tournament, and prizes are awarded by tickets drawn from the virtual tombola.

This means that while the best players earned a better chance in the draw, even the lowest scoring player in the whole tournament has a chance of winning the grand prize.

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FRIDAY NIGHTS

Win £50 Cash Every Night!



Every night at 7pm IGUK runs the online Frag Lotto competition within their LAN gaming centres, and participants do not have to pay IGUK to enter – it's all part of membership to their LAN centre. Friday night is THQ Night, and gamers all over the country settle down to play Dawn of War: Winter Assault. They compete from their local LAN centre and are drawn randomly into matches against other gamers with similar experience.

Each player receives one "Frag Lotto" ticket for entering the competition and one more ticket for each map won during the night. Their combined tickets are placed in a virtual tombola and the winner is drawn live on the website. By 9pm one lucky gamer will have won £50 cash, which is theirs to take home the same night.

Of all the games on IGUK's menu, Dawn of War: Winter Assault is the ONLY Real Time Strategy game amongst an array of First Person Shooters including Unreal Tournament 2004, Counter-Strike: Source, Call of Duty 2 and Battlefield 2. IGUK run a monthly chart to monitor what games their 50,000+ members play when they login to their favourite LAN centre. Winter Assault tops the RTS charts and is one of the most-played titles in IGUK! To play in these competitions you must be in one of IGUK's 80+ gaming centres around the UK, visit our website for your nearest.



Interactive Gaming UK
THE HOME OF BRITISH LAN GAMING



FOR YOUR NEAREST **IGUK CENTRE VISIT** WWW.IGUK.ORG

3+

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9/10 IN EUROGAMER. 8/10 IN EDGE.

8/10 IN 1up.com

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE SCORE?

IT'S TIME TO KEEP YOUR BRAIN YOUNG.

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NINTENDO DS lite
WWW.BRAINTRAINING.CO.UK



AUTO ASSAULT



Jon Blyth toots his horn at all the frankly irresponsible driving

DEVELOPER NetDevil
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE
www.autoassault.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99
(plus subscription)

AT A GLANCE...

An MMO that balances, at its extremes, arcade-style gameplay with complicated item tinkering. Great fun, but looks a bit rubbish.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

CARMAGEDDON 95%

CITY OF VILLAINS 81%

AUTO ASSAULT 70%

MMOS ARE POPPING up like randy midgets at the moment, and 97% of the world's population are playing between five and 30 games at the same time in monitor-filled Polyplay booths. So when another epic clock-scoffer bursts out, it really needs a convincing hook.

Auto Assault, NetDevil's *Mad Max* take on the genre, has something unique: speed. The car battles have you skidding around, blowing up buildings, fatally running people over and using up to four weapons and numerous skills at once. It's no *Lazy Susan* in character growth, either; initial levelling is good and fast.

Combat is definitely where it's at though. Between your turret weapon, fixed front gun, rear and melee weapons, there's plenty of upgrading going on. And death brings no penalty, so you can have a frisky pop at anything. The arcade style of fighting works surprisingly well with the more traditional RPG diceplay.

The world is huge, but it's uniformly bleak and unthrilling. The 'fetch-kill-thanks' approach to missions does get

repetitive, but there's good PvP combat, which should take off as the servers slowly fill up.

A small niggle – *Auto Assault* seems to finish every mission with: "Jeff Patella looks at you with a new sense of respect. He says that perhaps you are the one." Yeah, Jeff. You say that to everyone. Just give me the turret cannon and go back to your wife. Tch.

GREETINGS, MECHANIC

As well as arcade-style combat, *Auto Assault* has some of the austere faff of old-school RPGs. Making quality components by combining damaged ones harks back to *Diablo II*, and the crafting of items from others is intriguingly complicated far beyond *Oblivion's* Alchemy. If you're like me, you'll get a nice sensation when you realise you're one component short of a new mudflap.

The fundamental problem is that it all feels a little detached – for an MMO, solo play feels far more natural, as the speed turns most of the battles into one-on-ones dotted around the map. It's a great, unbeautiful game you can dip into or play

for hours, but whether you want to pay the subscription is a matter for you and Ben Cooper, independent financial advisor. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Functional, but not very pretty
Sound Atmospheric, but not very moving
Multiplayer Yes siree!

- ✓ The salty burst of combat
- ✓ The sweet tang of complexity
- ✓ That indefinable umami of satisfaction
- ✗ Slow subscriber uptake
- ✗ Repetitive missions

70

Should get better



DESPERADOS 2: COOPER'S REVENGE

Wiggedy wah wah west

DEVELOPER Spellbound
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.spellbound.de
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

System requirements 2

THE WILD WEST – a long-forgotten age when clichés roamed wild, feeding on the low-level foliage of lawlessness. It was a feral, macho time, where big swirly lollipops were not only frowned upon but didn't even exist. This is the world of the *Desperados* games, an RTS where your slow (and easily thwarted) progress through a map is achieved by the tactical control of six characters.

All the characters from the tiny Wild West palette are here: grizzled hero, busty heroine, someone called Doc, Mexican with dental issues. As well as a gun, each character carries specialist items – from ranged weapons like Doc's gas bombs and Sam's dynamite, to Sanchez's tequila, which sort of acts like a drinkable mine. All of these things play a different part in getting through the level.



Like the original, it's a game that requires patience, along with a sizey dose of trial and error. Given that a single shot will usually kill you, you might consider getting one of those head-sticks for paralysed people and leaning on it on quick save.

The only substantial difference between *Cooper's Revenge* and the first game is the addition of a first-person mode, but it feels more like Spellbound are providing an expected feature, rather than giving any genuine gameplay innovation. You'll use it, but you don't really need it.

Desperados 2 looks a bit dated, and the AI is basic 'search if you're heard, attack if you're seen'. However, it's still enjoyable – and with the effort comes a grumbling sense of achievement.

Jon Blyth



PCZONE

67

Weapon of choice



EVOLUTION GT

Driving you round the bend

DEVELOPER Milestone
PUBLISHER Black Bean
WEBSITE www.evolutiongt.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

TUCKED AWAY IN their little offices, deprived of the EU-recommended quantity of sunlight, developers often come up with some pretty strange ideas on how to set their product apart from the masses.

In the case of *Evolution GT*, the USP is RPG elements, allowing you to build up your driver's skills by winning races. Unfortunately, what the developers may have seen as a selling point (and may have been had the title been an arcade racer rather than a sim), will be seen by many as a massive turn-off, as it only serves to hamper your real-life ability. Opponents level up in the same way which sounds like a great idea, but actually leads to earlier races being full of drivers who make Maureen from *Driving School* seem like Michael Schumacher.

Another feature, intimidation (built up when being followed by



another racer) only makes opponents swerve, making them even harder to pass. It also ends up causing problems for the successful driver, as every time you overtake (and therefore put someone behind you), your own confidence decreases. The sound effects are also so amazingly poor they'll make you want to burn your earphones – and don't even get me started on the *POP*-style 'Tiger Effect' rewind...

Despite a competent driving model and some pretty if not amazing graphics, the title smacks of people thinking of potentially great ideas, but then adding them without play-testing, and therefore being oblivious to the fact that they've served not to make the game better, but worse. Not so much evolution as devolution.

Suzy Wallace



PCZONE

37

Crash and burn

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

IndieZONE



Martin Korda don't take no orders from nobody. No siree. He's his own man: young, free and independent. Just like all of this lot...



Jump, climb and shoot your way to victory.

GIBBAGE

DEVELOPER Dan Marshall WEBSITE www.gibbage.co.uk PRICE £6

SO HERE IT is, the moment of truth. After months of watching the developmental saga unfold in our monthly 'How To Make A Game' feature, Dan Marshall has finally completed *Gibbage*. Question is, it any good?

Sitting somewhere between *Rag Doll Kung Fu*, deathmatch and platform adventures of yore, *Gibbage* is a frenetic ride of reaction gaming and tactics. Featuring 29 diverse and superbly designed levels, you and your opponent (either human or AI) begin from a power booth. With your power level perpetually ticking down, you must run, jump and battle your way around each arena, collecting power cubes and returning them to your booth. The first player whose power

level reaches zero loses. While the concept may be simple the gameplay is anything but, as there are several ways to approach each level. You either concentrate on collecting cubes, spend your time trying to gun down your opponent with a variety of weapons, bombs and power-ups, or use a combination of the two.

Full of humour and powered by a great soundtrack, it's just a shame that *Gibbage* is so visually poor, as otherwise the score would have been even higher. Clearly, the months of hard work have paid off. Hats off to Dan (with a little help from his friends) – he's created a cracker.

PCZONE
71



I can definitely feel a spark.

R.I.P: STRIKE BACK

DEV White Elephant WEBSITE elephant-games.com PRICE \$1995 (£11)

A FEW MONTHS back when the nights drew in at midday, an arcade shooter called *R.I.P* won the Indie Zone Game Of The Month. Its gameplay – in which you played as one of three characters stuck in a stationary turret beset by scores of enemies – was a right laff.

Well, *R.I.P* is back with *Strike Back*, a sequel that bares many similarities to the previous game, only this time it allows you to go walkies. It's a bit of a mixed blessing to be honest, because the ability to run away from your

opponents takes away from the sheer horror of seeing masses of enemies closing in on your position with nowhere to run. However, the extra dimension of being able to move and take cover does work well, too.

There are still plenty of turrets to jump into too, along with power-ups and weapons to enjoy. In fact, save for a few AI path-finding issues (and some poor translation), this is still well worth a go.

PCZONE
59

ATOMIC BATTLE DRAGONS

DEVELOPER Isotope 244 WEB www.isotope244.com PRICE \$1995 (£11)

IF YOU HAVE a long memory or are a bit nostalgic, you might remember a game called *Joust*. Well, *Atomic Battle Dragons* bears more than a passing resemblance, tasking you with flying around levels on a dragon and jousting with mounted enemies. As well as taking them out with your lance, you can also land on their heads or use power-ups to turn them into ash.

Problems abound though. First off, the control system is abysmal. Gaining

height is no problem, but trying to move horizontally is infuriatingly fiddly thanks to a bizarre mouse interface. There's also very little variety, with most levels feeling incredibly samey, while the music soon turns into a monotonous drone, though admittedly, the storyline does add a modicum of direction. It's just as well it's got dragons, because it hasn't got a lot else going for it.

PCZONE
37



Try Gaviscon.



Is that a fish or a streetlamp?



The control system leaves much to be desired.

FINLAY'S FATHOMS

DEVELOPER Coral Tree Productions WEB www.finlaysfathoms.com PRICE \$14.99 (£8)



Dragon Turtle

Look out, a tortoise with a +4 magic flipper.

IF THERE'S ONE thing that *Finlay's Fathoms* is, it's novel. Think *Flipper* meets *Diablo* and you'll have a rough idea of what to expect in this sea-based RPG, in which you must swim around numerous levels preventing oceanic pollution, while collecting items and battling enemies.

Sounds like it could be quite entertaining right? Well, sadly, it's not. Conceptually, everything is solid, but the execution is about as sharp as a rusty guillotine. Bugs, glitches, lack of player guidance and no tutorial mean that *Finlay's Fathoms* instantly falls short of expectations. Sure, the myriad of items you can collect, along with some solid RPG mechanics do raise the bar, but in its current state, it simply doesn't warrant the outlay.

PCZONE
46



Anyone for lobster?



Watch out for tuna trawlers.

Developer Q&A

CORNUTOPIA SOFTWARE

Name: Mark Sheeky
Job Title: Head of Cornutopia Software/
lead developer
Company: Cornutopia Software
Website: www.cornutopia.net
Games: 44 games in total, including
Flatspace I & II, *Gunstorm*, *Firefly*,
Taskforce and *Radioactive*



that a serious game can have a top-down viewpoint.

PCZ What are the benefits and drawbacks of being a one-man team?

MARK The biggest benefit is creative control - and the biggest drawback is the workload. Expect 14-hour days with no holidays. Sometimes it's like spinning plates, or like juggling hedgehogs that have eaten hand grenades.

PCZ What advice would you give budding indie game developers?

MARK First, avoid publishers. They'll rip you off and if you want to be independent, you must want to do everything yourself anyway. Second, act on feedback. When people ask you to change something, do it. Third, it's better to make a good small game than an average big one.

PCZ Tell us about your company?

MARK I design, program and market the games myself, and my friend and collaborator Andrew Williams helps with the ideas and testing. I started making games for the Amiga, switched to PC in 1998 but didn't try selling my games until 2002.

PCZ Tell us about your *Flatspace* games?

MARK The first *Flatspace* game was inspired by another indie game, *Starscape*, which is a plot-driven arcade game. I always loved *Elite* and *Nethack*, so I thought I could combine those. Keeping the graphics workload down is important for any small developer, and *Starscape* proved

cornutopia

BUDGET

Are you on a bargain hunt? Then let the **ZONE** team be your daytime hosts...

SILENT HUNTER III

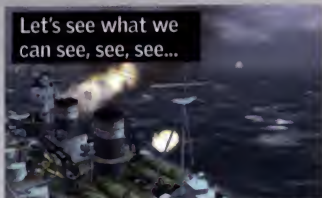
PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia **WEBSITE** www.focusmm.co.uk **PRICE** £9.99

IT'S SAFE TO say that the submarine simulation market has quietened down somewhat since the release of *Silent Hunter III*.

This ultra-pedantic sub-sim is still the best way of shouting 'dive dive dive' from the safety of your relatively dry desktop. It's as if the hordes of sub-sim developers saw *Silent Hunter III*, reclined in their leather office chairs, breathed a massive sigh of despair and said "there, *that's* submarines, they *got* submarines", before going home and applying for a real job.

It's true that, as far as accurately conveying the sense that you're trapped inside an airtight can for weeks on end, manually adjusting your torpedo calibrations and rudder alignments in order to expose a weak spot on some

Let's see what we can see, see, see...



WWII warship, *Silent Hunter III* hasn't been bettered since we gave it 83% last June. It's still graphically impressive and amazingly detailed. Then again, playing a submarine simulator hasn't gotten any more exciting either. It has however, gotten cheaper, so have a per cent on us.

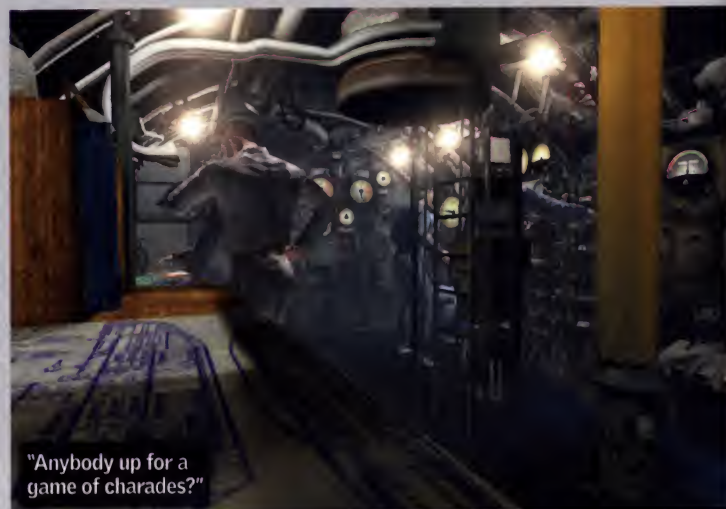
Steve Hogarty

PCZONE
84

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**



Hope no-one farts...



"Anybody up for a game of charades?"

**THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**

Steve getting a refund from Nestlé for a 'too chocolate-y' KitKat chunky:

Saving: £2



Steve finding a Cadbury's Caramel on the floor of the cinema:



Saving: 55p

Steve replacing his crazy housemate who wouldn't pay rent:

Saving: £400 a month

TO LET

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** www.mastertronic.com **PRICE** £9.99

EVEN NOW, *Warrior Within* remains a high-class third-person actioner and has been, in the eyes of this correspondent at least, usurped only by its own offspring. I'd plump for it even over Lara's latest return to form, since the Prince's combat still feels dynamic and exciting, while Croft's gunplay is enough, for me, to turn a sweet game sour.

The rock music and sexy bottoms still grate, but can be carefully ignored if you concentrate really hard on the neat locations, sprightly movement and happy violence of the affair. Also present, meanwhile, is the avenging demon known as the Dahaka – a beast that cues cool chase sequences through the map as anthropomorphic historical destiny (or something) tries to catch up with our boy the prince. Thing is though, there's not



The prince is such a bully.



much point in getting this for a tenner when you can procure the entire saga for 20 quid with the *Special Edition Triple-Pack of The Two Thrones*.

Will Porter

PCZONE
78



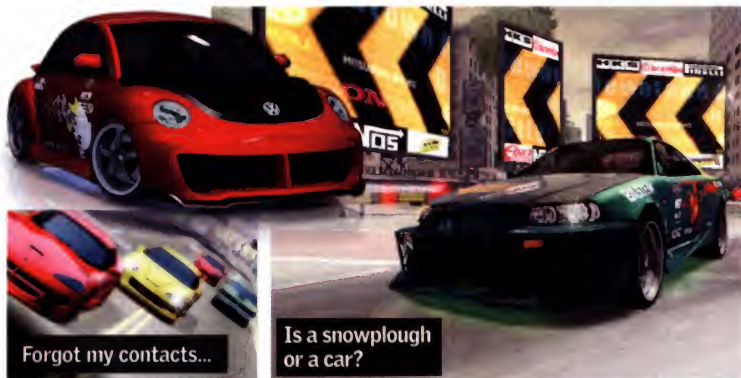
JUICED

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

EVER SINCE THE film world unleashed *The Fast And The Furious* upon a world of Kenwood sticker-bearing teenagers, the world of street racing has been big business. EA's *Need For Speed* franchise has typically been at the forefront, grabbing top Christmas sales spots for the last two years. However, should you manage to shoulder that behemoth aside, you'll find *Juiced* waiting in its shadows.

Bearing a striking resemblance to the film, *Juiced* boasts races to win pink slips, an extensive crew-based career and comes complete with the obligatory *Pimp My Ride*-style car modding. In fact, if you're the type of person who calls your car a 'ride', it ticks all the right boxes.

However, with older vehicles things are bound to start to fail: it's too easy to find yourself out of cash, racing can feel slow compared to the frenetic pace of



NFS and the graphics, from cars to tracks, could do with an added bit of sparkle. While *Juiced* is definitely a solid runner, it's perhaps not the street racer you were after.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
65



MEDIEVAL LORDS

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gsonline.co.uk PRICE £4.99

BEST DESCRIBED AS a *SimCity* for the Dark Ages, *Medieval Lords* is far more a city builder than fully fledged RTS. The basic theme follows the now standard theme of you building up your empire, fending off any nasty invasions and then expanding into neighbouring areas to start the process all over again.

Despite sounding more dull than watching uncut *Big Brother* footage, it's actually pretty competent when it comes to the city-building stuff – but the

successes soon start to unravel when war breaks out, with poor unit AI and a bizarre combat system that sucks all of the fun out of fighting. However, kicking the crap out of your neighbours isn't the main thrust, so if you're after a decent city builder in a different age, it's still worth a go.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
61



And the rest...

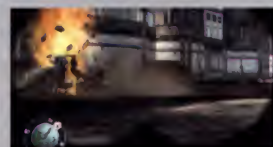
Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



SACRED PLUS
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

A combat-heavy, formulaic *Diablo* clone that comes complete with the expansion, this has a vast world to explore, novel character classes and more quests than you can shake a stick at. Not the most original kid on the block though.

PCZONE
62



SNIPER
£4.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Already on budget despite being on the shelves for less than a year, you may enjoy the more than competent long-distance shooting but will be disappointed by the conventional guns, shabby graphics and unrealistic level design.

PCZONE
59



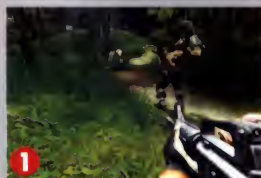
DINO CRISIS 2
£4.99, XPLOSIV

Games this bad are only worth buying so you can put the disc in the microwave and watch the pretty sparks. Originally a PSone title(!), the dreadful graphics and B-movie plot are just two reasons why this title is better off extinct.

PCZONE
07



PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1
FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in gaming-dom make *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



3
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

£9.99, BESTSELLER

Great melee, sneaky stealth and oodles of lawless violence – not all console conversions are a pile of old poo.



4
MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A true classic, *Medieval* lets troops do battle in real-time and lets you get tactical in this warfare masterpiece.



5
WARHAMMER 40K: DOW

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Even if you've never heard of the Games Workshop franchise, this *Command & Conquer*-style RTS is great-looking and explosive fun.



YOUR SHOUT!

Speak your brains on the latest releases



Another bad hair day.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

OUR SCORE: 95%

Oblivion lets you dive into another world, an RPG world that will take over your life – and then some. Visually, the game is stunning, but it's the sheer depth of content that's really breathtaking. To start, you can take in the sights and sounds while riding your horse across snowy mountain ranges, swim across lakes and around coastal ports and delve into gloomy caves and ruins. Then you can feel the bustle of the busy cities, risk your life in the blood-splattered Arena and at the end of the night, rest and recover in a nice comfy guild hall bed.

Ben Jones: 96%

THE GODFATHER

OUR SCORE: 57%

As an attempt to graft the brilliance of *Mafia* onto the free-roaming of *GTA*, this game has not only shot itself in the foot, but it's blown its whole leg off. The music lurches into naff accordion synth (just cringe-worthy), while the cars look rubbish, having neither the fun of *GTA*'s vehicles, nor the physics and realism of *Mafia*'s cars. Although the seizing of rackets is great fun and superior to the chore-like turf wars in *San Andreas*, the game is nothing like the film, clumsily paraphrasing famous lines and scenes, leaving me disillusioned and disappointed.

Peter Gamlen: 62%

"Whaddaya mean, the game's a bit shit?"

Review of the Month



He's just about to feel the force.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: NEW GAME ENHANCEMENTS

OUR SCORE: 68%

When I got my first glimpse of *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided*, my mind reeled at the possibilities that might await; after all, it's based on one of the largest movie franchises ever. Unfortunately, reality often has a way of bringing you back down to Earth faster than one might care to mention, and through many incarnations from beta to the current *NGE*, I saw a game I loved gradually destroyed. Gone were the things that made it so unique: its complexities, the richness of the professions, the ability to change professions and abilities and be essentially whoever or whatever you wanted to be. The *NGE* sparked a forum war, the likes of which I've never experienced in my ten years of online gaming. Every facet of the *NGE* was torn apart by the community, and while there were many staunch supporters of SOE and their vision of change, their voices were quashed below the steadily increasing din of the naysayers. Still SOE has persevered, and whether you agree with their plan or not, you must give them some credit for sticking with it in the face of such adversity and consumer apathy.

Erik Dougherty: 40%



Manly men playing a manly game.

RUGBY 2006

OUR SCORE: 62%

You're always bashing any sports game that isn't *Pro Evo* – *Rugby 06* being the most recent example. Solid graphics, good gameplay and some crunching tackles combine to make it into a great game.

OK, so it has some control issues and it's also hard on people new to the game, but once you get going, it's great. A steep learning curve is the only thing to make it drop just short of a Recommended award.

Kyle McCrann: 74%

YOU DO THE REVIEWS!

Agree? Disagree? Well, the world wouldn't be the wonderful place it was if we all thought the same way. If you fancy sharing your own thoughts with your fellow readers, then jot them down (we find the recent advancements in parchment and ink technology to be handy), trim the amount of words to a MAXIMUM of 100, add a score out of 100 then send them to the address below. If we think they're worthy of sharing, we'll print them here. Better yet, one of you each month will be awarded our coveted Review Of The Month award and showered with a gift of some description.

Send your reviews to: yourshout@pczone.co.uk, or stick them in an envelope and post them to: PC ZONE, Your Shout, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.



LIVE

WWW.WARONTERROR-GAME.COM

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Every gamer now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.



BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'A'

- 1 **ALIEN VS PREDATOR 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 110
- 2 **ALONE IN THE DARK 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 12
- 3 **AGE OF EMPIRES**
PCZ ISSUE: 72
- 4 **ALPHA CENTAURI**
PCZ ISSUE: 74
- 5 **ACTUA SOCCER**
PCZ ISSUE: 30



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES - STEVE HOGARTY

- 1 **FRONTIER: ELITE II**
PCZ ISSUE: 9
- 2 **PSYCHONAUTS**
PCZ ISSUE: 156
- 3 **BATTLEFIELD 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 157
- 4 **MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**
PCZ ISSUE: 136
- 5 **HALF-LIFE 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 148



PCZONE TOP 5 GAME BOX ART

- 1 **MAX PAYNE 2**
- 2 **SYNDICATE WARS**
- 3 **BAAL**
- 4 **STAR WARS: DARK FORCES**
- 5 **EVERQUEST: THE RUINS OF KUNARK**



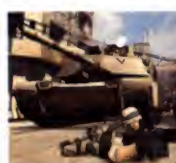
Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2
PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

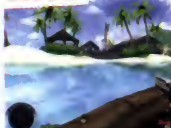
Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.

BUDGET



FAR CRY
PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



CALL OF DUTY 2
PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
PCZ Issue: 138 - 91%

UT2004 packs so much punch, you'd be hard pushed to find a flaw. Team games, deathmatches, tactical thinking in the Onslaught mode - everything the sci-fi shoot 'em up fan could want.



F.E.A.R.
PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Reantghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



SWAT 4
PCZ Issue: 154 - 86%

SWAT 4 is a tactical squad shooter that sings. Dark in places, brutal in others, it's the only shooter that allows you to tazer old ladies and drown them in pepper spray. Probably the best co-op experience around to boot.

Strategy

Must buy!



ROME: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Once upon a time, all strategy games were visual abortions and strictly for the hardcore (OK, a bit of a sweeping statement). But *Rome: Total War* changed all that, mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic, as well as staggering historical accuracy. The result is a masterpiece and a game just about anyone can enjoy. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II
PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



RISE OF NATIONS
PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of empire-builders, *Rise Of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones And Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the *Civ* genre.



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR
PCZ Issue: 166 - 86%

A brilliant real-time tactical map and amazing space conflicts makes *Empire At War* the best *Star Wars* RTS ever. It's only let down by its land battles - otherwise, it's beyond reproach.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS
PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



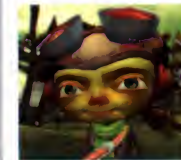
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES
PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *777* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation

Must buy!



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
No, you don't shoot things, nor there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



BUDGET

FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0

PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



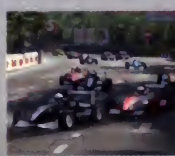
GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



GTR

PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%
As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, shunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as petrol. With a massive collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

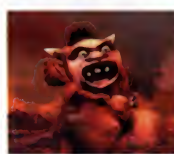
God games

Must buy!



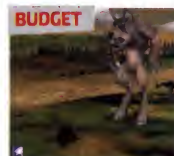
THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE

PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%
Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport

Must buy!



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of *Pro Evo* ever, also the best footy game ever.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%
One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. *Tiger 06* is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



NHL 06

PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.



MADDEN 2005

PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%
Although the 2006 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 2007 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

RPGs

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



BUDGET

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



BUDGET

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

June

COMPANY OF HEROES
DEVIL MAY CRY 3
FACES OF WAR
FLATOUT 2
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE
MICRO MACHINES V4
OUTRUN 2006: COAST TO COAST
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
RESIDENT EVIL 4
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR
RUSH FOR BERLIN
SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006
SILENT HUNTER 4
STRONGHOLD: LEGENDS
TIMESHIFT
TITAN QUEST

THQ
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
EMPIRE
VALVE
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
SEGA
UBISOFT
MIDWAY
DEEP SILVER
CODEMASTERS
UBISOFT
2K GAMES
ATARI
THQ

Beyond

ALONE IN THE DARK: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION
DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT & MAGIC
GOTHIC 3
HELLGATE: LONDON
JUST CAUSE
LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
MAELSTROM
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
PARAWORLD
PREY
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

ATARI
UBISOFT
JOWOOD/DEEP SILVER
NAMCO
EIDOS
CODEMASTERS
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2K GAMES
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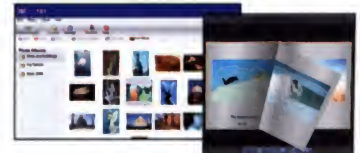
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Andreas Gauger

Chairman of the Board



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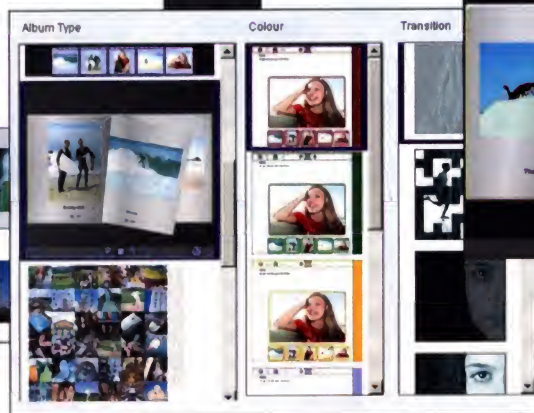


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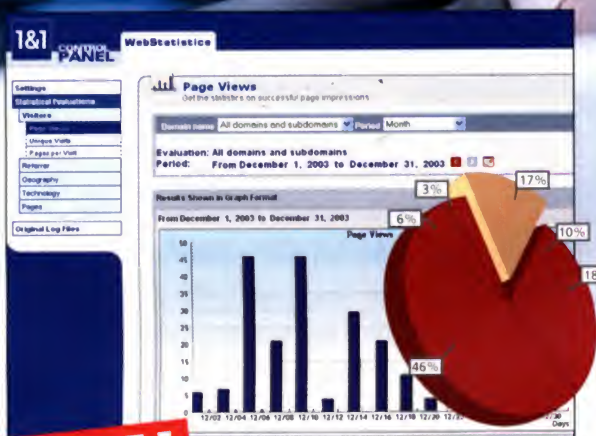
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No. 12/January 2006

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MARKETING TOOLS		
In2Site Live Dialogue	✓	✓
Chat Channels	5	5
1&1 WebStatistics	✓	✓
1&1 WebElements	✓	✓
1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓	✓
1&1 WebDatabase	✓	✓
Customisable Forums	✓	✓

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1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	18 pgs	18 pgs
1&1 PDF2Web Converter	✓	✓
Personal Merchandise Shop	✓	✓
1&1 Multimedia Archive	✓	✓
Full Version Software worth £400	✓	✓
FrontPage Extensions supported	✓	✓
Ready-to-run CGI library	✓	✓
ASP Scripting supported	✓	✓
ASP.NET, .NET Framework	✓	✓
PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓	✓
Database	2 MySQL	MS Access

DOMAIN NAMES		
Included .co.uk domains	3	3
Sub-domains	300	300
Complete DNS Management	✓	✓

E-MAIL		
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Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
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Virus scanning for accounts	10 Acc.	10 Acc.
Spam Filtering	✓	✓

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Chat Channels	✓	✓
1&1 WebStatistics	✓	✓
1&1 WebElements	✓	✓
1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓	✓
1&1 WebDatabase	✓	✓
Customisable Forums	✓	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

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DOMAIN NAMES

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Sub-domains	✓	✓

E-MAIL

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Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
1&1 Webmail	✓	✓
Virus scanning for accounts	20 Acc.	20 Acc.
Spam Filtering	✓	✓

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MARKETING TOOLS

	✓	✓
In2Site Live Dialogue	25	25
Chat Channels	✓	✓
1&1 WebStatistics	✓	✓
1&1 WebElements	✓	✓
1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓	✓
1&1 WebDatabase	✓	✓
Customisable Forums	✓	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

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PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓	✓

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DOMAIN NAMES

	10	10
Included .co.uk domains	3,000	3,000
Sub-domains	✓	✓

E-MAIL

	3,000	3,000
IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	✓	✓
Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
1&1 Webmail	✓	✓
Virus scanning for accounts	100 Acc.	100 Acc.
Spam Filtering	✓	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

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Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓	✓
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Password protection	✓	✓
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SSH Access	✓	✓

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What's in a Wii?

AT FIRST, I was delighted. A committee of idiots at Nintendo had decided that the best name for the company's new PlayStation-beater was 'Wii', to rhyme with 'see', meaning I could fill this column with piss jokes.

I soon discovered that every Web page on all five Internets was full of people asking each other if they wanted to play with their Wii, had they ever seen a Wii, would the Wii come in different sizes and/or colours, would girls have to sit down for their Wii and so on.

The company was quick to hit back. "You think about Google being an unusual name. You think about Virgin Airlines, Amazon, Napster, all those. These aren't just unique, but loved names for places that we all know." Yes, but they're not slang for a widdle.

Three days after Nintendo's original announcement, which had seen the likes of the Financial Times scoff at their name, the torrent of jokes died down to a background noise. Seemingly, the English-speaking world had run out of different ways to describe what one does in the toilet.

Then came the slogans - 'Eat, Sleep and Wii', 'Everyone Needs a Wii' - followed by jokes poking fun at the console's innovative, one-handed (don't start) controllers, which Nintendo itself refers to as 'Wii wands'. Oh great.

And to think that the original name, Revolution, could have helped dispel the long-held belief that Nintendo make toys for kids. Still want one?

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

NERD'S LUNCHBOX

rockdirect lappy gets a Stormreach lid

NOT LONG AFTER Toshiba launched its limited-edition Dynabook 2006 FIFA WORLD CUP EDITION laptop, replete with faux gold plating and CAPITAL LETTERS, rockdirect announced a notebook decked out in *Dungeons & Dragons* livery and limited to just 100 units.

The rockdirect is easily the more attractive of the pair, and unlike its Toshiba counterpart, it won't attract attention - you're less likely to have people lamping you and running off with it. It's also much faster. The Pegasus 650 on which it's based offers at minimum a 2.0GHz Pentium M 760, 1GB RAM and Radeon X700, and comes with the company's juicy three-year collect-and-return warranty, plus lifelong telephone support.

rockdirect describes the Stormreach machine as the 'ultimate mobile gaming laptop', hinting at the fact that, unlike models from our

favourite XTREME line-up, the Pegasus is designed for moving about. In short, it's not a desktop replacement. When not playing *D&D* online, battery life is predicted at three hours, and as a Centrino-branded product you get wireless thrown in - it means you can go to bed and keep playing with only a minimal risk of setting fire to your pubes.

The *Dungeons & Dragons* Online: Stormreach edition costs £999 and includes a free copy of the game. rockdirect.com



It also smells of spot cream.

SEVEN OF NINE
450MHz 7900 GT with AGP interface

GAINWARD ALWAYS USED to be a name you associated with peculiar artwork and bonkers video cards running non-standard clock speeds. While the artwork endures - there's still an evil oriental clown thing peering out from every cooling shroud - the cards are now lost in a crowd of rivals offering similarly tantalising alternatives to reference designs.

However, the company has announced its BLISS



AGP owners have never had it so good.

GeForce 7800 GS+ SILENT 512MB edition, at the time of writing the world's only AGP-based, 7900 GT-powered, GeForce monster with 24 pixel pipelines. Only 1,500 of these £350 beasts will be made, so get your skates on. www.gainward.net

NEWS ROUND-UP

playengine.co.uk is selling bamboo flat screen monitors together with matching keyboards and mice. Rather than using a thin plastic coloured in prosthetic-limb beige, the monitors are held together with the treated stems of bamboo plants. They look surprisingly good and are both plastic- and lead-free. The eco-friendly range starts at £239 for the 17-inch screen, rising to £323 for the 19-inch.

Motorola has applied for a patent which describes 'method and apparatus for evaluating locations according to Feng Shui principles'. Soon, you'll be able to buy phones which tell you which ancient Chinese philosophy you've broken and the flow of energy wherever you're standing. Given that any such device will have a flow of energy with a bloody great mobile phone antenna, presumably you need to be in a 'no signal' area before your qi rating gets above zero? What rubbish. motorola.com

ATI is about to ship its cable-free CrossFire driver for the X1800 GTO. The company has also announced that the GTO will be priced at just £130 inclusive. ati.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

REGET: After just five applications, your receding hairline will be a thing of the past. Call now for a trial pack, we promise You'll Have No Regrets™! **WINDOWS DEFENDER:** Shouting, "Go on, clear off you little rascallions, you can't play football around here any more", and then setting up a deckchair in your front garden. **ORIGO:** Usually the last word in many heated marital arguments, for example: "Either your worryingly vast collection of vintage Nazi memorabilia goes..." **THERMAL PASTE:** For when a Colgate smile just isn't enough (and maybe you want to poison yourself). **FAUX:** Sure, it looks like it says 'fox', but it's actually pronounced 'foe'. Those kooky French and their language japes.

EN7900GTX

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I get asked if it's a boardgame or a puzzle or a special edition DVD of that film with Sigourney Weaver...

WHEN FACED WITH the latest, biggest, baddest, most awesome graphics card in the history of the world ever, my heart sinks faster than an Argentinean warship.

Every card I get to look at is either Radeon or GeForce, and is priced perilously close to its nearest competitor, with only a couple of quid to separate them at retailers. Every card performs within a few benchmark points of rivals, leaving nothing but garish box artwork to tempt buyers. And of course, whatever I write will be ancient history when the card is superseded and made obsolete by whatever turns up one month from now.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

In an effort to prevent this review unfolding as yet another airboat ride to inevitability, I've decided to present it in diary form, from the card's early morning arrival to me going to bed.

The usual PCZ benchmark tests were made the following day, and the results were nothing short of prodigious.

8.55am: ASUS 7900 GTX 512MB arrives. Or rather, a nondescript plastic courier pack turns up in reception with

my name on it. Inside is a cardboard box with King Kong grimacing at me from the lid. Uh oh, movie tie-in. I sneak off somewhere where nobody can see it.

10.30am: Contents are strewn about my desk like the laundry on my bedroom floor. Box is spotted. I get asked if it's a puzzle or a boardgame or a special edition DVD of that film with Sigourney Weaver in it.

11.45am: With the help of two colleagues and a winch, we heave the card into place on the motherboard. There are King Kong stickers plastered across the card's surface and I gingerly lift one at the edge – yes, thank goodness, the big ape could be persuaded to return to his island.

11.50am: Relief abounds when the PC is powered up and small birds are not sucked through open windows into the card's cooling apparatus. The 80mm fan is imposing but quiet – pretty much silent, actually – when not fired up for gaming. Power consumption is less than any equivalent Radeon and you shouldn't need any more than 450W to feed it.

1.00pm: Lunchtime. Older titles such as *BF1942* are dismissed with contempt. *Battlefield 2* doesn't flinch, and *Far Cry* with maximum everything makes me want a

beach holiday in Trinidad. *KOTOR* makes me want to watch bloody *Star Wars* again.

5.00pm: *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is without doubt the best-looking game ever, although it can get a little lumpy outdoors and with HDR. Still, left at 17-inch LCD resolution, the frame-rate hardly ever drops below 50. A run through 3DMark06 delivers just over 6,000 marks.

6.15pm: *Oblivion* really is plush. Wish there was multiplayer.

11.45pm: In comparison with an X1900 XTX, the big GeForce is not quite the overall champ: the Radeon is actually a smidge faster. Not that you'd ever notice, mind, but if you start jotting down the numbers, the ATI flagship manages to keep a nose out front. It's also marginally cheaper, making it the most obvious choice for most gamers. Nevertheless, the NVIDIA card is the one to have if you're thinking of doubling up to SLI, because it demands a lot less power and isn't as noisy.

11.46pm: On second thoughts, it's not that expensive anyway, is it? And the software NVIDIA provides is far less crummy than that Catalyst Control Center business.

11.59pm: To bed, and to dreams of outsized gorillas and of Cyrodiil. **PCZ**



VX2025wm

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MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

BY AND LARGE, widescreen is a waste of time. Many products are bad value, with even the most basic 16:10 screen being pricier than its 4:3 equivalent. Buyers assume more money = more glass, but at a resolution of 1440x900, you get fewer pixels than at 1280x1024. It's also disingenuous of manufacturers to sell wide and standard products based on diagonal measurements: a 19-inch widescreen is noticeably smaller than its 4:3 equivalent. Then there's the fact that your eyes have a horizontal field of view of 150-degrees and a vertical of 120, meaning standard screens are better suited to human vision anyway.

And last but not least is the problem of gaming. Few titles allow you to choose a true widescreen format, because resolution hacks tend to stretch the screen or arbitrarily lose bits from the top and bottom. Which is crap.

But the moment you buy 20-inches or more, you're into a different realm. At this size, the native resolution of 1680x1050 is pretty much what we've come to expect from LCDs, only with added girth. The ViewSonic VX2025wm here is best treated

as a wide-body VX712. It has the same 8ms response time, the same bright screen, rich colours and sharp text, together with ViewSonic's premium build quality and attractive styling. The VX2025wm also has downward-facing speakers integrated into the bezel, meaning although they're crap, you can't see them.

I have but two minor complaints. The first is that there's no height adjust, meaning I had to raise it with my *Yellow Pages*. And second, there's no SCART or S-Video input, meaning you're out of luck if you want to use it anywhere but near your PC.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 20.1-inch Area: 43.3cm (H) x 27.1cm (V) Inputs: VGA, DVI, 3.5mm stereo audio line-in Native Resolution: 1680 x 1050 Contrast Ratio: 800:1 Response Time: 8ms grey-to-grey Brightness: 300cd/m2 Weight: 6.3kg Height Adjust: No Anti-Glare: Yes



EN7600GS

PRICE £100

MANUFACTURER ASUS

WEBSITE uk.asus.com



IN TERMS OF power, price and almost every benchmark result, the GeForce 7600GS is on a par with its arch rival the Radeon X1600 Pro. It's 10% faster than the old 6600 GT, our mainstream favourite of last year and NVIDIA's best-seller, but it's some 20% slower than the current 6800GS. And although the six-series GS is £50 more, you actually get more bangs for your buck and the option of an AGP interface. The newer card is strictly PCI-Express.

The 7600GS can also be a bit of a slouch next to the 7600GT, most noticeably at higher detail levels, but that's hardly a surprise – the card is little more than a lesser-clocked, lesser-priced version of its

G73-based, GT brother. But as is often the case, you'd not be able to tell the two cards apart if you were playing *Counter-Strike: Source* and weren't going crazy with the detail settings.

Because the 7600GS isn't as highly strung as its sibling, passive cooling apparatus replaces the need for a

fan. The G73-based GeForce you see here is a perfect partner for your living room media centre or shuttle, its soundlessness making you realise just how bloody noisy video cards have become over the years. Indeed, if you have a small form factor machine, the 7600GS makes perfect sense – you can also double up to SLI and still enjoy total silence.

The only problem you might have is actually getting the card in the slot. On the ASUS, the cooler wraps over the top of the card and protrudes a couple of centimetres the other side, precluding the use of a tall card alongside it. If you're a Shuttle owner, make sure you buy your GS online as you can then return it if it doesn't fit.





DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Up to your neck in debt? Partner sleeping around? A propensity to wake up on Saturday morning with a kebab and beer can stuck to your face? We can't help with any of those (but if you know the answers, let us know), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.

FORMAT CAPACITY

Q I was really scared when I started seeing unknown programs that needed to be manually closed each time I shut down my computer. On the caption bar of the 'Force Quit' window, it said something like ccapp, and the other said netbroadcasting. I'm really scared – is it a virus? A hacker? Please help me. I do download demos and stuff, but mostly from your cover DVD.

Francois Lecompte

A In these situations, the best thing I can do is advise that you have a recognised anti-virus product installed on your PC, together with a recognised anti-spyware tool. Good anti-virus products include Eset's NOD32 and Symantec's Norton Anti-Virus 2006, costing £23 and £24.99 respectively. For people who would rather put their money towards the next video card upgrade, AVG Free can be downloaded at any time from free.grisoft.com.

To help protect against spyware, Windows Defender is free to any verified user of Windows XP – serves you right if you're using a bent copy – and Lavasoft's tried and tested Ad-Aware Personal is available at www.lavasoft.com. Don't download virus and spyware utilities from anywhere but the publisher's homepage.

The reason I can't offer advice on individual applications is because looks can be deceiving. While the ccapp.exe you mention is a common process – it's actually



part of Norton Anti-Virus, do you have it? – it can also be something more malicious. More often than not, the people who write virus and malware programs obscure the true behaviour of their creation behind familiar or comforting names. Adopting the appearance of a legitimate application increases the likelihood of it spreading, because even the dumbest user will delete something called systemdeath.exe.

BUY NOW PAY LATER

Q My existing computer – something I only really use for games – is out of date. I've recently been looking to buy a new top-of-the-range machine – Athlon FX60, 2GB RAM, 7800GTX and a 160GB hard drive. The system is coming in at around £1,600. I know that there are always new advances on the horizon, but

I've been reading a lot lately that 2006 is not a good time to buy a new computer. The reason put forward is the release at the end of the year/next year of DirectX 10 and Windows Vista – basically, any system bought now will be left behind faster than normal. What do you think?

Justin Lewis-Vivas

A DirectX 10 (DX10) and Vista are joined at the hip, in the sense that the former will be part of the latter and the latter won't work without the former. Additionally, we'll never get to see a version of DX10 for Windows XP, because many of the improvements it brings – it's six times faster than its predecessor – require the Windows Vista Display Driver Model.

Simply put, it's a total rewrite of what you have now and isn't backwardly compatible. However, we'll see a version of DirectX 9 (DX9) for Vista in order that anyone upgrading to the new operating system this time next year will still be able to play their games – so in that sense at least, if you buy a system today, you're not heading up a blind alley.

However, the arrival of Vista and DX10 also herald the arrival of DX10 Radeon and GeForce cards. As we head towards the end of 2007, we'll begin to see increasing numbers of 'Vista-only' games which take full advantage of the new DirectX, leaving the current crop of graphics hardware high and dry.

Having said that, any gear you buy today will be out of date by Christmas, let alone this time next year, so why not bite

DRIVER WATCH

Keep your PC happy

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.4	APRIL 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 84.21	MARCH 06

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER	15 NOV 05
Creative	AUDIGY, AUDIGY	4 2.08.0004
		24 JAN 06

End Program - Bank Account Info Snarf.exe



This program is not responding.

To return to Windows and check the status of the program, click Cancel.

If you choose to end the program immediately, you will lose any unsaved data. To end the program now, click End Now.

Assuming you have any money to steal...

End Now

Cancel

"I've been reading a lot lately that 2006 is not a good year to buy a new PC. What do you think?"

Wandy comes to the aid of Justin Lewis-Vivas



the bullet? My advice would be to focus on getting that FX60 and not worry too much about pairing it with a top-banana video card just yet: if you plan to be an early adopter of Vista, you can always swap out the card for a shiny new DX10 one.

WORKING MEMORY

Q I decided to build a great gaming PC and purchased an AN8 Fatal1ty SLI, Athlon 64 3800+, 2GB Corsair RAM, 160GB HDD, GeForce 6800 GS with a 500W PSU. I boot Windows XP from the CD and it runs through the installation. I reach the point where I specify third-party RAID drivers, and when it gets to actually starting Windows, I see the following error on a BSOD: PAGE_FAULT_IN_NON_PAGED_AREA. Help please!

Simon Goodley

A Your Corsair memory is bad. Remove a stick and go back into Windows setup to see if it completes. If that does work, swap the sticks over and try once again. In the event you discover one – or indeed, both – of the chips are faulty, contact the retailer who sold them to you to arrange a refund. My preference would be for an exchange as there's nothing intrinsically wrong with Corsair RAM.

TOWARDS OBLIVION

Q Being a sane member of the human race I'm going to be purchasing *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, but my system specs – Pentium 4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM, GeForce FX 5200 – don't seem to be up to the job. I was thinking of adding another 512MB memory and possibly investing in a new graphics card – the X800 GTO you feature in your Buyers' Guide caught my eye. Do you think this would be enough, or do you have any other suggestions? I would also point out this will be my first ever PC upgrade.

Keith Muirhead

A While the PC you have now exceeds the minimum system requirements to run *Oblivion*, you're not going to be getting a lot of joy running the game on its minimum settings. If it were an online, multiplayer, fragging-laden shooter, I'd tell you to live with low detail, but since it's about sucking you into another world where frame-rate isn't a high priority, I think an upgrade is in order.

Unfortunately, you don't give me a budget. The 128MB variants of the X800 GTO can be had for as little as £60, and that ain't going to buy you a card which passes muster – you'll still be leaving most of the detail sliders on their bump stops. Additionally, the fact you have an older FX card means you're restricted to AGP upgrades. The problem is that if you buy a new PC or decide to upgrade to a PCI-Express motherboard later on, the money you spend now is effectively wasted.

However, if we assume you're happy to stick with your current underpinnings, the GeForce 7800 GS or GT with 1GB RAM and an overclocking utility should do the job.

FREE PORT

Q I have an issue with Steam. Around six months ago, the Steam platform was updated and now it doesn't work on any of my machines. The issue appears to be with my Origo wireless router: I've been told to try port forwarding, only to find I can't forward enough ports to allow Steam to work. I've paid £30 for *Half-Life 2* and now I can't play it, nor can I get the expansion pack. As a subscriber to your magazine, I thought I'd give you a try – can you help? *Far Cry* works fine, so does *Halo*.

David Shearn

A You don't need to set up port forwarding if the connections you make are initiated inside your LAN – in other words, if you're not intending to host a game, only play it, you shouldn't need to change to your router's configuration. The router's internal brains should handle all the connection translation in such a way

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

Controls both your downloads and your bandwidth. We like.

11 REGET

EXPECT TO PAY \$14.95
reget.com

Download managers have fallen out of favour in recent years. Broadband connections are now so wide that even the biggest files appear in one sitting and alternative Web browsers such as Firefox duplicate the core features of what was once a very busy genre.

But there's still a place for the dedicated download manager. Their main function these days is to control how fast the data arrives, allowing you to get on with gaming and surfing without fear of incoming files saturating your line. In ReGet, there are three throttle states: red, amber and green, each configurable to

that the ports used are irrelevant.

My guess is that either your router is not compatible with Steam – and Steam isn't always the easiest application to please – or that you're running a firewall. The best thing you can do is to try upgrading the

Origo's firmware, but I've not been able to connect to the Origo site to see what the latest version is, nor if any fixes are Steam-specific. Suffice it to say, your experience demonstrates why you should only buy recognised brands. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Q: I've never applied thermal paste to a CPU before, and I'm a little scared of doing it for the first time. Can anyone give me any tips or pointers? **A:** Clean your processor carefully with a cleaning fluid (most retailers who sell thermal compound will also sell you thermal compound cleaner) and don't touch the surface – your fingers are greasy. When you're ready to apply the compound itself, apply a small amount along one edge of the chip and, using the side of an old credit card and a little pressure, smooth the compound across the surface and make sure it's evenly coated. Arctic Silver Céramique hasn't let me down yet.

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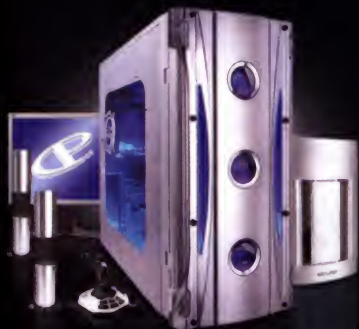
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GAMER EXPLORER | 80

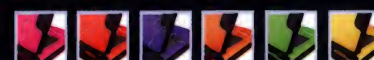


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Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Pleased remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

WATCHDOG

Not all companies are bad – but if they are, write to us for help...

ALIEN ABDUCTION

Reader Christine Holt is the proud owner of an Alienware Area 51 laptop – or at least she was until a couple of months ago when it started to freeze when she was playing games. After ringing Alienware's technical support line and trying out various suggestions, she decided to send it back to the experts. Three weeks later, her laptop was returned, but without any kind of information about what Alienware had done to it. Lo and behold, ten minutes after switching it on, the laptop froze up again. Getting straight on the phone to technical support, both parties agreed that the fault might lie with the ATI X800 card that lay in the heart of the machine.

After getting them to agree to send out an NVIDIA 6800GO as a replacement, Christine sat back to await its arrival – but after weeks of the card not arriving and having to chase it up on the phone, a DHL van eventually pulled up outside Christine's house. Excited to be getting her laptop working again, upon opening the parcel Christine was disgusted to find that instead of the brand new NVIDIA card promised



in a timely manner, or indeed, the correct information about the situation prior to that. To that end, we are in the process of examining our internal procedures and investigating further the reasons why these lapses occurred. We will make whatever changes are necessary to ensure that this experience is not repeated." They also mentioned that they had offered Christine an undefined goodwill gesture to "assure her of how much we value her custom". Let's just hope that it's enough to keep her as a customer...

DISAPPEARING DELL

Back on March 16, Kim Allan ordered a computer from Dell over the phone and was told that it would take between seven and ten days for delivery. Four days later, she missed a phone call asking her to get in contact with Dell. She phoned back, didn't get an answer and left a message of her own. A few hours later, Kim received a call informing her that her computer

was due to be delivered in two days' time. She assumed that the problem had been sorted, but when delivery day came around, no computer was to be seen. Kim phoned Dell but was unable to get any information from the out-of-hours pre-recorded message since her order number and customer reference number didn't match. The following morning, upon ringing Dell, they could tell her nothing except that the order had been recalled, and she should speak to her bank manager as there was a financial problem. But when she went to check her balance, she was shocked to discover that the full amount of money had been taken out of her account by Dell, so she's been left with no money and no computer!

Beginning to think that this had been a bad month for all PC manufacturers, we got straight in contact with Dell who stated: "Thank you for bringing Ms Allen's query to our attention. We have since escalated this query to the most appropriate levels within Dell. We've contacted Ms Allen to advise her that a refund has now been issued to her. As a company we pride ourselves in the level of service we deliver and take matters such as this very seriously. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our standards of service and support, and any feedback we receive which helps us achieve this is most welcome."

So at least Kim's got her money back – her only problem now is working out who she's going to spend it with... PCZ

The money had been taken out of her account by Dell, so Kim's been left with no money and no computer!

to her, she'd been sent a used, scratched-up ATI card with no heatsink or fan and just to rub salt into the wound, she'd also been billed £228.24 for the privilege!

Quite frankly a bit shocked that a prestigious company like Alienware would send out a second-hand card, we got straight in contact with them to see what we could find out. They issued us with a swift reply, stating: "We have apologised unreservedly to Mrs Holt for the problems she has experienced in trying to get her issues resolved. As explained to Mrs Holt, we received notification from our vendor that the NVIDIA card requested is currently in worldwide supply constraint. At the moment, we are awaiting a delivery of NVIDIA 6800GO cards which we should receive by the end of this week. Once we have received them we will get the correct card shipped out to her immediately. However, it is inexcusable that she did not receive the correct video card

THE ACCUSED

DELL™

ALIENWARE

Guilty until proven innocent

The screenshot shows the Dell United Kingdom website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Dell United Kingdom' and a search bar. Below this, there's a section titled 'What's New at Dell' with links to 'New! XPS M1710 Notebook', 'New! Dell EMC AX150i', 'New! OptiPlex 210L', 'At-Home Service', and 'New! Dell Projectors 1200MP & 2400MP'. The main content area is divided into four columns: 'Dell Home Systems' (Home, Gaming, Dell Outlet), 'Dell Business Systems' (Small Business, Medium-sized Business, Large & Global Organisations), 'Public Sector' (Defence, Local and Central Government, Schools, Healthcare, Higher Education), and 'Services & Support' (Services Offerings, Online Technical Support, Customer Care). A banner at the bottom right says 'Dell: apologies sent to Kim Allan.'

**Mrs Mitchell cut the school run
in half with her Callisto GXR SE**



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REMEMBER:
YOU ALSO NEED
MONEY FOR FOOD
AND CLOTHING

We are legally required to remind readers that money splashed on hardware may be better spent on families, wives and girlfriends. PC ZONE isn't liable for any estrangement that may ensue.

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Be loud, be proud – vent your shopaholic tendencies here...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

X1900 XT

EXPECT TO PAY £371

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.



PROCESSOR

ATHLON 64 FX-60

EXPECT TO PAY £740

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE amd.com

Running at 2.6GHz, the Athlon 64 FX-60 actually clocks slightly slower than its predecessor, the FX-57, but runs dual-cores each with a 128KB L1 cache. In essence, it's seriously bloody fast. If you're looking to build an overclocked colossus which smokes 99% of other systems out there, look no further.

SCREEN

MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

EXPECT TO PAY £311

MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi

WEBSITE www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk

The LCD1970GX is a 19in LCD screen, with an 8ms response time and an inky black glass screen that saturates all the colours and darkens the shadows. It includes a joystick controller for the on-screen display, and a four-port USB hub.

MOTHERBOARD

FATALITY AN8 SLI

EXPECT TO PAY £125

MANUFACTURER ABIT

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Designed specifically for gaming, the nForce4 SLI-based Fatality AN8 supports all 939-pin AMD processors. As well as SLI support it features ABIT's Guru Panel, a front-mounted display unit for overclockers. The board also uses a bevy of ABIT features, including QTES cooling and AudioMAX 7.1 onboard audio.

HDD

RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £190

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SPEAKERS

Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £188

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

They'll cost you over £200, but they're also the best speakers we've ever tested at PC ZONE. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SOUND CARD

SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £129

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

X800 GTO

EXPECT TO PAY £110

MANUFACTURER GECUBE

WEBSITE gecube.com.tw

You could save yourself a tenner and go for the 8-pipeline GT, but you'd be missing out. The GTO is without doubt the mainstream card to go for; an overclocking dream, it can trump the 6800 GT on maximum detail and this GECUBE comes with a heat-pipe and sensible bundle.



PROCESSOR

ATHLON 64 3000+

EXPECT TO PAY £88

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE www.amd.co.uk

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty in the BIOS, Athlon 64s can be highly rewarding – particularly so on an nForce4 motherboard. Famous for overclocking and top performance in games, there's really no alternative. This AMD chip is the one to have if you're building to a budget.

MOTHERBOARD

A8N-E NFORCE4 ULTRA

EXPECT TO PAY £55

MANUFACTURER ASUSTek

WEBSITE uk.asus.com

The A8N-E supports the full range of Athlon 64 FX, dual-core Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon 64 chips, plus PCI Express and 7.1 channel audio. The nForce4 Ultra chipset has more features than a circus has clowns, and ASUS includes a raft of its own, as well as some serious overclocking tools.

HDD

1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY £48

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY £159

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710s is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

SOUND CARD

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS

INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £39

MANUFACTURER Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

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NCsoft



ARENA.NET

PC CD-ROM

12+

www.pegi.info

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**PCZONE**

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE GAMES!

F for free

IT'S HUMAN NATURE. Ever since there have been shackles there have been hacksaws, ever since there have been walls there have been windows, and ever since there have been restrictions there has been freedom. Sure, there are differences between the 'being at liberty' sort of freedom and the 'downloading *Garry's Mod*' sort of freedom, but freedom and Freeplay stand for the same founding principles, and they have the same number of syllables too.

I was reminded of this as the *V For Vendetta* movie came to a close and the tyrannical Houses of Parliament were destroyed. My friend turned to me with a chocolate bar he'd found under his seat, a slight look of disgust in his eyes. "I'll eat that," I announced, checking it for syringe holes. The removal of an oppressive government, the discovery of a Cadbury's Caramel, who's to say what freedom truly means? All I know is that freedom is sticky and slightly melted on one end.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

Did you pack your horse?



Get far enough through the Dark Brotherhood quests (in *Oblivion*, obviously) to be given Shadowmare, the indestructible horse. Knocking him unconscious allows you to access his inventory. Stash any number of items on him, then knock him out again to get your stuff back!



Soldiering on.

112 Demo Pages

Get your free games here!



Charging in.

116 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Teeing off.

118 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Diving down.

120 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Lashing out.

124 Fight Club

Take us out, online! Now with more trounce to the ounce!



Dressing up.

128 Characterise in Oblivion

Create a character with our guide!

**PCZONE**
FREE-O-METER**0**
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

**239.0**
HOURS*

Demos

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EXCLUSIVE!

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

When regular warfighters just don't cut it...

www.ghostrecon.com/uk/ghostrecon3

FIVE THOUSAND SQUARE kilometres of sun-baked urban chaos. This is man country, where men are men and women are more men. We're talking about Mexico City of course, where absolutely everybody wears a poncho and a massive floppy sombrero while lazing about in the sun chewing on something mysterious and probably alcoholic.

Sample the delights of this magnificent and historic city by booking

a flight and taking out massive amounts of health insurance and limb insurance, something which costs a whole lot of money. Or you could just play our exclusive demo of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, which gives you the entire second mission from the squad-based shooter absolutely free.

It's pretty authentic too (if you ignore the gaping differences between the game and the real trip – like diseases and hurricanes). Check out our six-page review on page 62 for our verdict.



CAR

Your first victim when acting the scallywag should be the common car. Here we have a typical Mexican vehicle with its owner nowhere to be seen, along with the other 8.6 million people living in Mexico City, oddly enough.



BLOW UP

You can shoot windows out, doors off and tyres down, but for the most impressive feat you should lob a grenade at the car, stand well back and shield your eyes from the heat. "Now go car, tell your car friends what I did to you."

SCALLYWAGMANSHIP

Your guide to being an annoying idiot



GRENADE?

"What, you don't want me to not throw this grenade? Wait, wait... You do want me to not never throw the grenade... At your face? Oh sorry, I misheard. I thought you didn't want me to throw this grenade, did I get that wrong?"



SHOOT

As with any squad game, it's an unwritten rule that you must, before anything else, turn 180-degrees and shoot your team members in their faces. Not only is it a lot of fun, it's... No wait, it's just fun. But we think that's enough.



RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR



Egypt me and I want my money back

www.midway.com

SOMETIMES IT'S NICE to be the general, sipping a latte while your loyal men toddle off to get impaled by Roman javelins. But if you're like Cleopatra – the ancient Egyptian hussy who enjoyed the odd milky bath – you might prefer putting aside your hot beverage and chinning some Romans yourself.

This *Civilizations At War* demo hails the unholy alliance of the RTS and action genres. Kick the snot out of lowly Roman slave bows, then leg it to the war room when the centurions turn up. That's the kind of cowardice that built Egypt into the international superpower it is today.

What's an Egyptian urn?

About £5 an hour



I FEEL LUCKY

Ah, an urn. Ancient Egypt's Kinder Egg. What goodies will it hold? Herbs? Milk? More herbs? A quick swing of my trusty scythe will release the goodness within, blessing us with either wholesome wheat or a cheap plastic terrapin.



URN-BELIEVABLE!

What's this? The urn turns out to be no more than a glorified first aid box, relieving our virtual hero of her pain like some kind of instant-action Calpol. And to think I swam across an entire lake to unearth her secrets. Curse you, urn!

TITAN QUEST

All hail the crow-stabber

www.titanquestgame.com

YOU COULD SAY that *Titan Quest* is *Diablo* with ragdolls in Ancient Greece, only a whole lot prettier. In the first batch of missions included in the demo, you'll get to fend off a bunch of crows,

boars, satyrs and harpies, and level up a good few times in three of the eight available disciplines – enough to get a feel for the lava-sweating legend you're inevitably destined to become.



EXCLUSIVE!

SIR KILLSALOT

And the feudal system hasn't even been invented



SATYR IS DEAD

What is it with Romans? Shame they couldn't get their noses as straight as the roads! Jokes like this eventually caused the downfall of their empire.



PUT SOME CLOTHES ON

I'm your father and you're not going out like that. There's people out there with flaming swords who might stab you all to death.

COME ON THEN

You stupid crow



1 I chose to be a Pyromancer, because the brochure said I'd get volcano hands. By level 5, all I'd managed was a really warm sword.

2 Crows – the crazy Mel Gibson to the old-fashioned wild boar that is Danny Glover. It's a partnership that shouldn't work – but it does!

3 The foulest of all the beasts, these harpies get you to look at their babcocks then kick you with a chicken leg. Erotic.

THE BEST OF THE REST



BONE: THE GREAT COW RACE

We've got over 200 bones in our body, a potentially dangerous amount. When you consider the constant threat of cow-racing in our nation's car parks, it's astounding that this game wasn't made sooner. www.telltalegames.com



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

Most creatures in fantasy games have internal bones in endoskeletons. If they don't, they've got chitinous carapaces, or are gelatinous blobs who find it really hard to pull. www.mightandmagic.com/HeroesV/



2006 FIFA WORLD CUP

Football! A ridiculous, meaningless pantomime, afforded a baffling and unjustifiable importance by millions of brainwashed, demented devotees. Oh, hang on – that's *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Football's brilliant. www.esports2006fifa.com



HEARTS OF IRON II: DOOMSDAY

Look at that map. There's no colour on it at all. Nobody owns anything. Everyone must be just driving around in their wigwams and igloos and worshipping rabbit-shaped clouds. It won't do – get down there and conquer some sense into them. www.henrysubtan2.com



DESPERADOS 2

tinyurl.com/msb58



A handsome hero, a seductive minx, a drunken Mexican and some bloke who chucks TNT about. When it comes to Wild West cliché, this game has everything. The doctor even swears, just like people used to in the olden days.

PACIFIC STORM

files.vgpro.com/games/pc/pacific_storm/



If you love flying airplanes, but you've had your pilot's licence revoked because you kept stopping to play RTS games, then you're an arse who really doesn't deserve our help. You'll like this game, but still – you're a staggering arse.

SNIPPETS



TALKING CATS

Seeing as the Internet's full of crap like that guy who can stick all those marbles up his nose, we feel we should only ever mention the most thought-provoking and inspiring Internet movies. This is one we've watched about seven times – it's about these cats who can talk! Not just like in that crap Disney movie either, these ones make real words with their kitty mouths. We especially like the impromptu feline poetry at the end.



VOID IF REMOVED

www.void-oblivion.co.uk
An original and ambitious mod for *Oblivion*, *The Void* hopes to start with a blank world and allow its players to build their own stuff and submit their edited versions – a bit like a massive Wikipedia page, except with Argonians, Imperials and Dark Elves. We'll be keeping an eye on this one.

GARRY SELLING OUT?

Popular *Half-Life 2* mod gets commercial gmod.garry.tv

PROBABLY ONE OF the most popular mods ever created, *Garry's Mod* has been channelling *Half-Life 2* fans' voyeuristic tendencies for a while. But Valve have recently struck a deal with the eponymous Garry and agreed to sell the mod over Steam for the paltry sum of \$10. The current version will still remain free – for now.

Does this signal the beginning of the end for free quality mods? Or are hard-working developers finally getting the financial breakthroughs they deserve? We cast a retrospective eye over the mod on page 118 and conclude it's worth every penny – but we'll have to wait and see how this affects the meta-world of free PC gaming as a whole.



Shameless self-promotion...
With corpses.



WIN A FOSSIL DIGITAL WATCH!

Six Fossil Big Tic watches worth over £75 each to be won!

PSSSSSSST! YES, YOU, sir or madam. Follow us down this mysterious, dark alleyway hidden from the prying eyes of the fuzz. Right. Fancy one of these extra-special Fossil digital watches? You do? Smashin'. For the first prize we have three unique, Atari-themed affairs featuring the classic *Centipede* and *Breakout* arcade games for you to win. Not bad, eh? No wait! Don't leave yet – we also have three more Fossil Big Tic watches in our jacket, with smart robot and number themes!

OK then, maybe some dirty postcards? No? You want to try and win one of these lovely tickers that were, er, acquired from Atari HQ? Heh heh. Knew it. OK then, to stand a chance of grabbing one, simply answer the following question and tell us your most-wanted PC game for 2007:

Which classic 1979 Atari coin-op had you blasting large chunks of floating space rock?

Send your entries on a postcard or the back of an envelope to Atari Fossil Watch compo, **PC ZONE**, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Make sure you get your entries to us by Wednesday 21 June. Any received after this date will be burned in a bizarre ceremony where everyone drinks pina colodas.



BEHIND THE FANGS

PC ZONE speaks to the man behind *Max Payne 2* mod *7th Serpent: Crossfire*

PCZ: Who you are and what you do?

DJ: "My name is Diego Jiménez, I'm 21 and I've worked on several different roles for the duration of developing *7th Serpent*. I'm the overall project lead, the level design lead and for this particular episode, I'm the level artist."

PCZ: Would you say the best gateway into the development industry is through modding?

DJ: "I would say so, but try to get an education first – and not necessarily one from a game development school. However, degree in hand or not, ultimately it all comes down to showing your prospective employers what you can do in the real world. I'm a college drop-out and come from a tiny third-world nation in Central America, but I worked the mod scene for over four years and ultimately succeeded. It's not easy, but if you've got the passion and the drive to make it work, it's perfectly possible."

PCZ: You say some of the team have moved on to work for professional development studios?

DJ: "We were able to attract very talented modders into the project from the very outset, so I think it was to be expected. The original environmental artist we had for our first episode landed a job at Gearbox Software and went on to work on *Brothers In Arms* and its sequel. And then just recently, I managed to get hired by Digital Illusions in Sweden as a level designer, with my work on *7th Serpent* comprising an important part of my portfolio."

PCZ: *7th Serpent* has a fantastic orchestral score. Who did the music?

DJ: "The man in charge of our music is Chad Seiter, a successful composer from Hollywood who's been involved in major film and television productions like *Lost*, *Alias*, *The Incredibles* and *Mission: Impossible III*, as well as games like *Mercenaries* and *Black*. We approached him through his website in early 2004 with solid early material, and he was impressed enough to sign us up as a volunteer side-project. He has contributed about 11 orchestral tracks to our first episode."

PCZ: How do you feel about devoting so much of your time to something that won't make you any profit? What's the incentive? And what's the reward?

DJ: "In my experience, it's very tough. Most modders I've worked with never finished their tasks or goals, either because of lack of motivation or because of time constraints – although I do believe if you really want to, you find a way to make it work. But the rewards are plenty. I still find it utterly amazing that we have the opportunity to create a game out of nothing, one that can play and look as good or better than any commercial game, and that can be accessed by hundreds of thousands of gamers across the world. The beauty of modding is how it democratizes the game-making process and its reward is the joy of creation. What can be better than that? And then of course, parallel to that, most modders want to make a living making games and here you have it – a level playing field where you can earn employment outright. It's amazing, really..."

SNIPPETS



FOUR DOWN

snipurl.com/pggh
Fed up with Sudoku stuff? Why not try your hand at possibly the most difficult and contrived crossword puzzle ever. With each of its answers and clues revolving around *Halo* developers Bungie, it'll probably take more than a few train journeys to complete.



MOBILE GAMING MADNESS

snipurl.com/pgp7
Have a desire to show off? Want to play *Doom II* on your iPod? Is that how you want to show off? Well check this out, with the latest third-party firmware (which is neither supported nor endorsed by Apple), you can play the classic shooter on your miniature 'puter. Don't ask us how the controls work, though.



Non-exploding petrol tanks are obviously not a thing of the future.



Bald men are more aerodynamic.

Show-off.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH MATRIX ONLINE



Update 41 means: 'Male NPCs will no longer be called Shirley or Sandy.' Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Movie of the Month

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

We really can't wait to find out what's happened to Gordon. Will he and Alyx finally settle down somewhere nice? Will Gordon bake soufflés, wear a pink apron and say "..." to Alyx? Will she reply: "Why yes Gordon I'd love some," and then laugh until the sun sets on their perfect lives? We can but hope...

It's Dog! How Valve managed to avoid making him corny as hell we'll never understand!

Hope they don't remember what they are! He's just realised he's a judge at cat shows.

Those Combine were so confident in their bridge-building skills. Before.

The *Half-Life 2* logo and the 'buunggg... buunggtthhh' sound effect. We're quite excited.

RED SUN RISING

Generals does the time-warp in *Tiberian Sun Rising*

rising.cnc-source.com | Mod for: Generals: Zero Hour

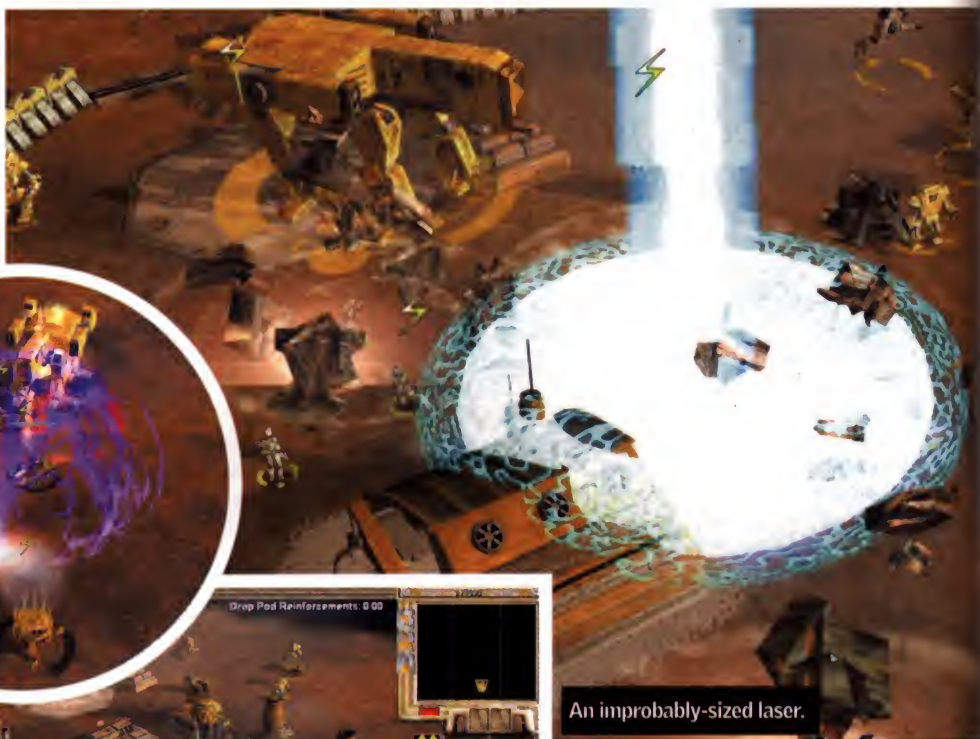
IF OUR MASSIVE exclusive first look at the latest in the *Command & Conquer* series (p54) has you itching to jump back into a Nod vs GDI skirmish, then this mod just might be the C&C injection you're looking for. *Tiberian Sun Rising* – perhaps unsurprisingly judging by the title – remakes the last *Tiberian* series' entry using the *Generals: Zero Hour* engine, and it's looking very nice too.

All of your *Tiberian Sun* favourites return, in addition to some original creations which – much like a nightclub toilet attendant – help freshen up the old warhorse. Making a polygonal revival are classic structures like the Firestorm Wall Defences, Nod Stealth Generators, plus familiar features such as growing Tiberium and sub-terrain units. We haven't seen any *Red Alert* attack dogs yet, but we've got our fingers crossed anyway.

You only have to look at these screenshots to see that the *TSR* team have got the visual trickery right, so we're hopeful they hit the mark on the gameplay side too. Now all they've got to do is get it out before the next C&C game arrives.



A Tiberian sunrise if ever we saw one.



An improbably-sized laser.



Ew, it's all sticky.



Legend has it that vampires are harmed by fire.

I AM A VAMPIRE

Nosferatu creeps out of the shadows

www.nosferatuthegame.com | Standalone

VAMPIRES – WITHOUT THEM,

Sarah Michelle Gellar would be pushing trolleys around outside Tesco, goths would be doing something productive with their lives and capes would probably still be cool. But with them, we have the prospect of a genius and long overdue online FPS.

Several obvious elements should have already fallen into place like *Tetris* blocks in your brain. For example, in *Nosferatu*, a team of slayers will be fighting a team of vampires. Vampires will have the ability to turn slayers into vampires. Vampires can only be killed with a stake through the heart. Slayers will have guns

to stun the vampires, while vampires will only have claws and teeth (but will be far more agile). It'll be a last-man-standing type of gameplay too, with each player having a single chance to take out as many enemies as possible.

Then there are some less obvious additions, such as having a persistent character whom you can level up and gain more abilities and weapons for as you play, and maps which allow you to climb all over them. Head over to the website to see what you can see, but the mod, in popular fashion, carries a 'when it's done' release date. And that sucks. Hah! Vampire pun.



The Eye of Sauron makes a brief appearance.

SPEAK UP MAN

Eternal Silence 2 glides gently into view

www.eternal-silence.net | Mod for: Half-Life 2

YOU DON'T REMEMBER *Eternal Silence 1*? Let us explain. The first *Eternal Silence* mod, built on the BF1942 engine, never made it past a public alpha version before the developers scrapped it for redesign. Now they're transferring the designs to the Source engine, and the '2' has been added mainly to distinguish it from its unfinished predecessor.

Gaspingly overlong explanations of a single digit aside, *Eternal Silence 2*

follows the standard sci-fi routine of calling Earth 'Terra', and features all-powerful governments fighting against the plucky rebel factions. The screenshots available all look quite lovely so far, and the developing team deserves kudos for developing a new world rather than sucking another egg from the exhausted anus of the *Star Wars* chicken. There's no release date yet – so when the developers say 'when it's finished', read 'a while off'.



FREEPLAYBUZZ

SO, YOU WANT TO BE A...

CREATIVE DIRECTOR



NAME Phil White
JOB TITLE: Director of creative technology & ops
WORKING ON: *Carpe Diem*, *9Dragons*
AGE: 32
EXPERIENCE: *Dragon Empires*, *RFOonline*, *Archlord*, *D&D Online*, *LOTRO*

PCZ How did you get started?

PW I've been a gamer since a young age, and during the start of my working life I worked on a number of Internet projects, one that was gaming related. This got me into a role at Codemasters and I moved on from there.

PCZ What's the pay like?

PW Working for Persistent Worlds, a new company self-financed by the owners, the reward is in developing and moving forward with great games like *9Dragons* and *Carpe Diem*. Saying that, a pile of cold, hard cash wouldn't go amiss...

PCZ What does your job involve?

PW It varies. It could be discussing the direction of a new in-game movie, reviewing art work or checking out new animations. I also watch kung-fu movies, but that's for research...

PCZ How rewarding is your job?

PW The real rewards will come once the games move into public beta testing and we can show it off. Working with talented teams on both games is always a joy.

PCZ Most annoying part?

PW We have some awesome things which we can't show until the marketing guys say the time is right. Also, not being able to beat our CEO when he's playing the role of Uzziel in *Carpe Diem* is beginning to become annoying.

WE SAY... DIY

Being a creative director is about directing people's creativity. Make a friend draw you a picture, tell him it's wrong and make him do it again. Check out where such exercises in creative direction got Phil at www.9dragonsonline.com



OMG! BOOBZ!

Degrade yourself with a topless *Oblivion* tweak

www.snipurl.com/pxtb | Mod for: The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

YOU'VE SPENT WEEKS

wandering the countryside, exploring dungeons, overhearing rumours and upgrading your abilities. Now, it's time to lose three pints of saliva over, wait for it, boobs!

That's right, if you install this mod, the female characters of *Oblivion*, previously burdened by welded-on 'bras', can now have them removed and their femininity exposed. Can you imagine that? A

lady's breast, with a nipple on the end? Frankly, we're amazed you're still reading this – has your skull-top not opened on a hinge to allow your brain to fly around the lampshade like a moth? Are you not irreparably agog?

Actually, this unofficial third-party mod has resulted in *Oblivion*'s US rating being changed from 'Teen' to 'Mature' – the equivalent of an '18' rating. Americans, eh?

MOVE OUT

The *Objective* machinima reports for duty

www.snipurl.com/pxtc

YET ANOTHER PIECE

of fantastic machinima action arrives this month, this time courtesy of the *Battlefield 2* engine.

In the 15-minute long movie, a group of soldiers must find and destroy a thermal radar to prevent the tide of war swaying in the direction of the bad guys, as tides of war

are known to do if left unchecked. With some decent voice-acting and a great musical score, *Battlefield 2: The Objective* is definitely worth a look. You can also find it on Google Video if you can't be bothered downloading it, so you've no excuse. Unless you're averse to explosions and guns.





Freeware



Unpinched pennies tremble with fear, *Steve Hogarty* is here

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames. This month, take to the fairways with *Albatross18*, blast some shapes in *GridWars 2*, visit Wabbit Island in *Dofus* and dish out strategic pointed-justice in *Warbears*.



DOFUS

What did you call me?

Dev: Ankama Studio
www.dofus.com

I'VE BEEN GIVEN strict instructions from Suzy to include *Dofus* in this month's Freeware and I'm not sure why. Is it because it's a fully-featured massively multiplayer online jobbie with a bright and colourful design? Is it the swords, quests, items and abilities? Or is it the inclusion of professions and crafts, usually omitted from these kinds of free games? Or maybe it's because there's a place called Wabbits Island in it?

Well, yes... It was the Wabbits Island thing. Apparently it's run by King Wa Wabbit, and overrun with evil Wobots (possibly led by Jonathan Ross). *Dofus* is free to a certain point, but that's good enough for us – we just wanted to mention Wabbits Island.



ALBATROSS18: REALMS OF PANGYA

Tee and a sandwich, anyone?

Developer: Ntreev Soft | www.albatross18.com

EVER PLAYED SNOOKER and thought, 'wouldn't it be great if I could play on an 800-yard table, outdoors, with just a cue ball and five less holes, while standing on the table with a golf club and tees and caddies and bunkers and things – is there a sport which is a bit like that? Possibly with some more grass?'

Unfortunately not, you mad thing. However, you'll be interested in this online multiplayer

'golf' game from Korea. Unsurprisingly, *Albatross18* is bright, colourful and vibrant, featuring spiky-haired characters with big glossy eyes and crazily-proportioned hands and feet – like Pete Doherty, except without the air of festering death.

The golf itself is controlled in typical fashion, with sultry taps of the spacebar dictating power and accuracy. Get it spot-on and the word 'PangYa!' flashes up on screen in big chunky letters, your ball sparkles and a baby animal is possibly born somewhere. It's a solid enough arcade depiction of the sport as well as a lot of fun, and the overall polish and production exceeds that of most other freeware titles.

Also, the better you play the more Pang coins you garner. Use your Pang to buy new clothes, characters, caddies and items to help you play, such as 'Nerve Stabilisers' which we can only assume is a playful version of a psychotropic anti-convulsant prescription drug. You gain experience as you play too, levelling up and increasing your stats as you do. The 'catch' is that you have to fork over real cash for the best items, but that's easily ignored (or explored, if you get hooked). Besides, it's supplementing the best free online golf RPG you'll come across.



GRIDWARS 2

Set squares at the ready

Dev: Marco Incitti | www.incitti.com/Blitz

IT'S ALWAYS HEART-WARMING when you realise you're at the helm of a PC which can provide the best visuals of any videogame in the history of mankind, and you're instead spending more time playing a game which could probably run on your mobile phone (although not mine, as it's soaked in Kronenbourg). Imagine forking out for an Xbox 360 and *Project Gotham Racing*, only to spend more time playing the semi-hidden *Geometry Wars 2* demo instead. That's what a lot of people do, because as trite as it sounds, the sheer unilateral pleasure of destroying hordes of geometric shapes supersedes any need for flashy HDR lighting or real-time thingy-bobs.

Not only that, this completely unofficial, free and fan-made PC version is an improvement over the 360's, bringing to the table a host of tweaks which you'll only recognise if you've already shovelled hopeless hours into the console version. The most obvious change is that there are no levels this time around, just an endless stream of enemies to destroy. Other changes are less apparent, but ultimately more important – such as the new way the black holes work, now allowing you to lure enemies into them, keep the hole's

mass in check to prevent it exploding and racking up huge combo points when you finally pop it. Endless, addictive fun.

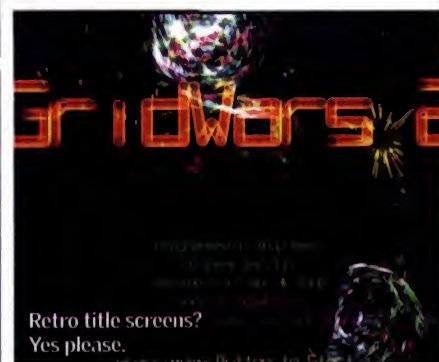
Also, if you don't already own one, I'd suggest picking up a 360 pad for Windows (compatible with the 360, but not vice-versa). It really is one of the best PC pads you can buy.



It's a bit like *Robotron*.



It's a bit like *Smash TV*.



Retro title screens? Yes please.

WARBEARS Time to bear arms and arm bears

Dev: Gionatan Iasio | www.ioji.it

YOU HAVE TO wonder what role humans play in worlds where animals walk on their hind legs and have regular jobs – such as *Richard Scarry's Busy World*, which is set long after a suggested human genocide, but with a worm in a top hat driving an apple prompting the legitimate question: "What the hell is going on?"

Warbears sees a team of special-ops bears in a side-on point-and-click adventure-puzzle game. Groundhogs with drills have taken hostages inside a bank, and it's up to you and your ability to succeed through trial and error to save the day. The puzzles, and moreover their solutions, are obscure but funny – and not just because it's done with bears and furry animals. There's a human in there too if you get far enough – he delivers a pizza about halfway through.



Careful, they've got drills.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

RRRRThats5Rs

Don't shoot the puppy

START

Dev: RRRRThats5Rs
Web: www.rrrrthats5rs.com/games

Here's something that's more interesting than entertaining: a series of Flash games which parodies to the point of absurdity gaming conventions we've all come to accept. Whether it's preventing the death of a puppy by doing absolutely nothing, or clicking a button once every minute for as long as you can be bothered, RRRRThats5Rs' games tread that fine line between total crap and a unique artform which we, as sophisticated gamers, can sit back and smirk knowingly at.

Once you're done with the games (they won't last you long, unless you're playing *Get To The Finish*), read the comments to see crowds of people 'just not getting it'. Or perhaps they do get it. They get it so much they're parodying the types of people who don't. I can't tell. Come back next month and I'll have a real webgame.

FREEPLAYPLAY!



7TH SERPENT: CROSSFIRE

Steve Hogarty wonders what happened to the other six www.7thserpent.com | Mod for: Max Payne 2



THE SIX MILLION Dollar Man, who due to inflation (and the rarity of actual bionic men) is now probably worth closer to a billion, has been thrown into obscurity by time and the decline in popularity of people just like him. Oddly enough however, The Six Million Dollar Man recently did the voice of Big Mitch Baker in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, a game developed by Rockstar. And here we are now with *7th Serpent*, a mod with a super-enhanced man in it for *Max Payne 2* which was, wait for it, published by Rockstar. You see the tenuous and irrelevant link? It's there though.

7th Serpent is a mod which puts you in the genetically-enhanced mega-pants of a super-soldier – one with all of Max Payne's moves and abilities, only this time with some

sort of plausible reason for being able to manipulate his own perception of time (that reason being his genetically-enhanced, assumed superpowers).

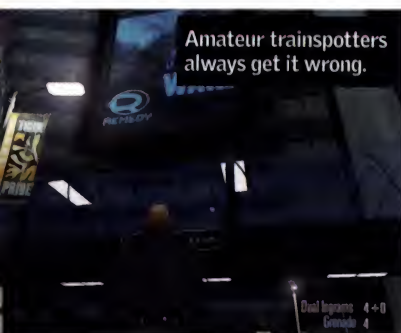
WE CAN REBUILD HIM

Unlike *Hall Of Mirrors* (issue 168), *7th Serpent* uses the original game's own strengths rather than trying to crowbar in over-complicated and flashy animations. As such, the whole mod feels like an extension of *Max Payne 2*'s slow-mo shooter action sequences, and not only that, it's steeped in high production values and some amazing music and sound (something mostly neglected with no-budget mods).

This, the first episode of the series, takes the *Max Payne 2* engine outdoors and into entirely new environments. Level design

feels restrictive at times, essentially locking you into an area until you eliminate every enemy, but for the most part *7th Serpent*'s set-pieces are enough to carry you through the single level on offer here. Enemies are no longer restricted to people in balaclavas either, instead extending to destructible cars, tanks and even helicopters. Weapons have been added too, such as rockets, along with an entirely new graphic novel to wrap your eyes around.

7th Serpent is easily one of the best *Max Payne 2* mods available right now. Backed by a dedicated team, a clear agenda and a realisation that while you can rebuild a man into some sort of bionic superhuman, you can't improve upon *Max Payne 2*'s fundamentals, this mod series can do anything but fail.



Play: **MOD**

FREEPLAYPLAY!

NINJA TOURNAMENT



Demons, ninjas, what could go wrong? Jon Blyth ponders dungeondoom.d3files.com/ninja_tournament/index.htm
Mod for: Doom 3

IT'S A BATTLE LONG overdue. Ninjas love silently padding across damp grass on a moonless night, and demons – they've got a heavy rock theme tune that kicks in every time they appear. It's hardly convenient for co-operative stealth missions. Can you imagine a ninja shushing a demon as, every time they tip-toe forward a few precious steps, the chorus of *Rage Against The Machine's Killing In The Name* kicks in? It's nonsense. And that's why ninjas hate demons.

Ninja Tournament gives you the chance to play the *Doom 3* campaign as a ninja in both single and multiplayer modes, if you can find anyone else playing. Once you've mastered your two moves – vertical chop and cheeky side-wiggle – you can combine them by whirling your mouse around into what I've dubbed 'the Spasm Tornado', which will just about kill anything directly in front of you, after they've shot you



"We're going to need a bigger ninja."

several times. It's about as much fun as having a horse vomit on your omelette.

It could have been played more for laughs. For a start, all the other good guys were regular marines. The first level should have populated with ninjas. I wanted a ninja to look up from his engineering work and tell me to report to the comms room. But instead we have ninjas and demons in not-fun shocker? What next, pirates and vodka?



"Uh, Phil, is that you? Turn off the light honey."

KREEDZ CLIMBING

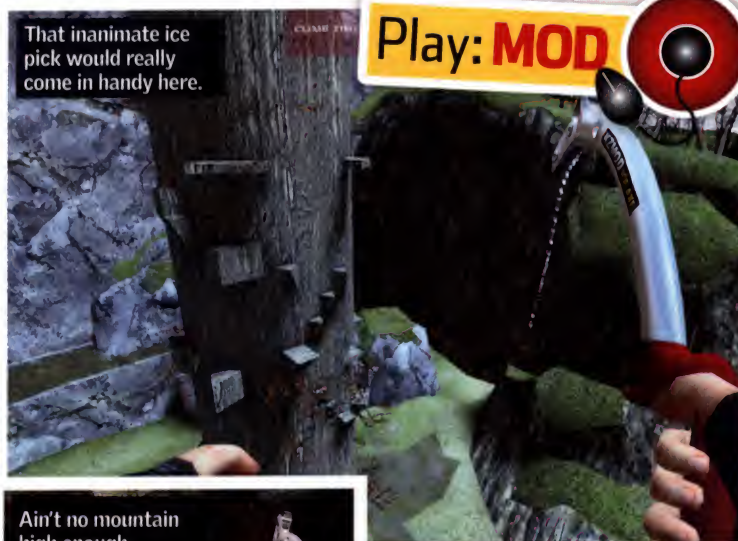
Jon Blyth gets shot of the guns kzmod.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2



THE SPLASH SCREEN lets you know they're not dicking around; you're being offered *Kreedz Climbing* "because gaming needed a change". Before you prepare your mind to be blasted from its primitive bone scabbard, I should explain that *Kreedz Climbing* is more of a jumping game, replacing the *Half-Life 2* gunnery with an ice pick. An ice pick that you won't be using, because it's a jumping game, like I said.

The controls aren't particularly intuitive at first – to climb even the lowest block, you have to duck after your jump. Once you've got that, you can learn to awkwardly strafe slightly in mid-air, which you'll need to master the difficult long-jump. And that's about it. Once you've sussed this new batch of motor skills, it's a simple matter of jumping around and going up.

As a part of a larger FPS game, platformer elements are annoying distractions. But when the jumping's all you have to do, it's quite a relaxing diversion. It's not the change that gaming needed, but it's a friendly enough way to spend your Tuesday evenings.

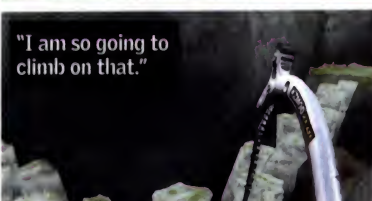


"That inanimate ice pick would really come in handy here."

Play: **MOD**



"Ain't no mountain high enough..."



"I am so going to climb on that."

PCZONE TOP 5 PIRATE MODS



1 AIR BUCCANEERS

In this *UT* mod, there are pirates in hot-air balloons floating around and firing cannons.

2 PIRATES VIKINGS AND KNIGHTS II

Upcoming *Half-Life 2* mod with pirates (among other things).

3 BATTLEFIELD PIRATES

More pirates in *Battlefield 1942*, pirating it up just like you knew they would.

4 PIRATES MOD

A mod for *Homeworld 2* which adds space pirates (who are still pirates).

5 PLUNDER ISLAND

The currently unreleased *Monkey Island* mod for *Unreal Tournament*.

GARRY'S MOD

Play: **MOD**



Jon Blyth gets his legs forced into an undignified position

gmod.garry.tv | Mod for: Half-Life 2



GARRY'S MOD NOW stands glorious, proud and utterly delicious at version 9, teetering on the brink of a commercial release. With the next version carrying a projected \$10 price tag (and the current version remaining as a demo), let's recap why *Garry's Mod* is still one of the most popular mods around.

This is the sandbox mod that gives you access to all the objects of the *HL2* and *Counter-Strike* world, and a big set of tools

to weld them together, add joints, thrusters, balloons and more. Most strikingly, all the ragdolls can be meticulously posed using the physics gun, their faces tweaked with a hundred sliders. After getting sex scenes out of your system – a process that takes many hours – chances are you'll end up tying the G-Man to the back of your buggy, setting him on fire and driving over the bumpy bits. Laughing.

The latest version implements Lua, a scripting language which allows you to go even deeper, creating new weapons, add your own HUD information and even make your own game modes. Version 9 comes with several game modes included such as Hide and Seek, Bridge-building and seagull vs soldier action in Bird Poo.

What is *Garry's Mod*? It's the best Meccano set in the world. It's putting a wheel on a pigeon. It's giving thrusters to a headcrab. It's priceless, even with a price tag.



"You're right, I can see my house..."



It all went bad when Mossman sneezed.

Classic: **MOD**



ACTION HALF-LIFE

Lights, camera...

www.ministryofaction.net/files.php For: Half-Life

IT COULD BE argued that the world of modding peaked alongside the original *Half-Life*'s hysteria. Not that it's been downhill since then (you just have to look at *Garry's Mod* above, or *7th Serpent* on the previous page to see that), but *Action Half-Life* was one of many fantastic *Half-Life* mods released for the now decrepit FPS. Taking the original game's online mode and wrapping it in John Woo-eque silver screen style, the mod added features like diving through windows, bandaging and knife-throwing.

While subsequent versions vary wildly in terms of balance, the recently released *Action Half-Life: Director's Cut*, which we've linked to above, is widely regarded as the definitive version and is the one you're most likely to still find people playing.

EARTH'S SPECIAL FORCES

Andy Robinson grabs his Dragonballs

www.esforces.com | Mod for: Half-Life



Play: **MOD**



Take it outside.



Green is definitely in this season. Head-spikes too.

THERE AREN'T MANY *Dragonball Z* fans here in the PC ZONE office. In fact, while playing this mod I felt compelled to cover the screen when other members of the team walked by, lest I be ridiculed for the rest of the month at the sight of a bottle-blond monk screaming on my monitor. Luckily, we can see past the embarrassing anime licence and recognise that *Earth's Special Forces* is indeed bloody good fun.

In a wild departure from the original *Half-Life* template, *ESF* has your character flying around a massive arena, shooting energy beams and generally exploding the crap out of any other anime combatants that happen to cruise by. The boffins behind *Earth's Special Forces* could have left it at that; we would have been quite content zipping around shooting lightning at spiky-haired McFly rejects. But no, there's a whole other level to the mod's combat; once you get up close and personal with an enemy, you'll engage in turn-based melee combat, where grapples, blocks and combos are all possible. It's almost enough to entice us to watch *Dragonball Z*. Almost.

FREEPLAYPLAY!

CIVILIZATION IV MODS

Tweak the history of mankind? Sounds like a job for resident Meier expert *Will Porter*... www.civfanatics.com



Play: MOD

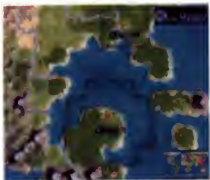


SEEING AS IT'S fairly easy to fiddle with the guts of *Civilization IV*, there are quite a few amateur hack jobs floating around the Interweb. I've discovered some that have chewed up the deepest thoughts and workings of my PC through their insistence in creating 200 separate cities, each packaged with an army of thousands; I've discovered mods that promote the insurgencies of every Earth-bound minor nation; and, as you can see, I've found an awful one that's based on Harry Potter. Put simply: there's a lot of ahistorical knobrot out there. Proudly wade through my global shit filter then, as we contemplate a game of *Civilization* where modification has changed the course of human history. Much as the Borg attempted in *Star Trek: First Contact*...

"I enjoy fishing, mining and long walks in the park."

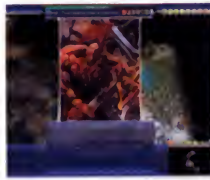


Blue Marble



NASA's favourite photo is known as 'Blue Marble' – the most detailed and accurately coloured satellite image of Planet Earth. Now though, it's been tailored into the most accurate world *Civ* map available. Obviously it doesn't bring a huge amount to the world mechanics themselves – but if you're pining for accuracy in mountain placement, it's certainly an unobtrusive tweak for the game.

Fall From Heaven



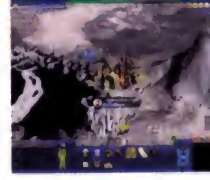
An excellent mod, this refurbishes *Civ* mechanics and bends it towards more fantastical whims – *FFH* saw me as ElfieBadMoon, leader of the Dark Elves. With temples to plunder, barbarians replaced with 'giant barbarians' and stuff to research like Golem Mastery, it's one of the few *Civ IV* mods that doesn't feel as if someone's simply taken all of Meier's ideas and changed the names to something wacky.

Civilization IV Gold



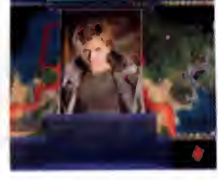
Perhaps the most all-encompassing mod in terms of jamming a whole bunch of new nations into the *Civ IV* framework, *Civ IV Gold* rings with the air of being a definitive endeavour. New indigenous Great New leaders are even animated as they were in the vanilla game. Even if Deganawida of the Iroquois does look exactly like Julius Caesar after he's discovered his mum's make-up box. . .

Song Of The Moon



A somewhat work-in-progress mod, but still one with impressive conception and execution, *Song Of The Moon* looks forward to a glorious age of human expansion into space – and the inevitable turf battles and inter-corporation bitching that it will no doubt usher in. Spacemen and low-gravitational combat mix it up with technologies produced by a mind that's attained an AS Level in physics – or perhaps higher.

Harry Potter



I, Neville Longbottom (sic) of Dumbledore's Army, adolescent faction of the Harry Potter Universe in book six, am at war with wicked Barty Crouch Jr – DeathEater of ill-repute and new Doctor Who. I'm not advocating that you play this mod (crap and unfinished as it is), but it does ably demonstrate that the ease of modability provided in *Civ IV* has its downpoints. Someone call Rowling's lawyers!

Fight Club



First rule of Fight Club: we're not very good...

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

THIS MONTH'S BATTLEFIELD 2 scrap was scheduled for a 6pm start, but by the time we'd got everything working it was half past, and Sefton had unleashed 17 shades of foul language at the technological mire that was keeping us from our beloved readership.

Then, an invisible mist parted, and we were in. The jubilation quickly devolved into a slapstick celebration of the Keystone Cops, as Jamie drove a jet

plane into a stubborn hill, Log accidentally walked out of a flying helicopter and Andy tried to get into a plane that was taking off, and so got run over. It was like watching 20 drunken vicars trying to hug a tiny jelly cube.

However, from reading the *ZONE* forums, it looks like other magazine's readers joined in too – and got mopped up. We're the best, so there... Next month: June 1, 1800 hours, *Quake 4*.



AND THE WINNER IS...

Snaps, crap pile and pap

EVERY MONTH, WE hover a gigantic shoe-shaped crap-magnet over the Jenga tower of tat that looms in our office, like an undesirable obelisk. This magnet has been finely tuned to attract only the finest grade of discardable guff. Once we've scraped its harvest from the sole, we quickly put it in a sealed envelope and try to think of people we can post it to. And this is how the screenshot competition was born.

Send your shots to fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk, and it could be your name on the outside of this fragrant Jiffy parcel of delight. This month, Chris Kinnerley bags the prize with a collection of frankly eerie photos of him just looking at us. Congratulations Chris, and we'll be drawing our curtains from now on.

BEST SHOT



A real *Top Gun* moment.

AND ANOTHER...



I suppose all plane shots are *Top Gun* moments, though.

ZONE CHAT



It's good to talk. And type.
Tippety tappety lol...

READ
THE FULL
TRANSCRIPT AT
WWW.ZONEGAMES.CO.UK

THIS MONTH'S ZONE chat, once it dragged itself out of the inevitable topic of 'what if Lara Croft was your mum?', focused on Will's impending visit to LA for E3. As people going to E3 always seem to do, Will stressed exactly how much work it's going to be. It's like a sad-eyed millionaire saying money doesn't bring you happiness; it's hard to feel that much sympathy.

The chat then moved on to Nintendo. Wii get the feeling the phrase 'please don't turn this into a conversation about Wii' is a line that'll become more common as the jokes become stale and dry up like, well, wee.

Our regular competition was won by Reids, who was the first person to phone Log up and say 'Amanda Barrie'. Note: phoning Log up and saying 'Amanda Barrie' will not normally win you a prize. Next ZONE Chat will take place on the May 31, at 5pm. And if you don't like that, then we simply can't apologise enough.



"Whatever we call him, it has to begin with 'S'."

How to join in!

If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps your flatmate's sending a long email to an ex, he's crying and you don't want to disturb him – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. ZONE staff might even be there. The latest information can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Andy Robinson PCZ_EssexHoodlum
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1 SWAT 4
swat4.zonegames.co.uk

2 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015

3 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

4 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

5 BATTLEFIELD 1942
DC MODDED
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567

6 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

7 WOLFENSTEIN:
ENEMY TERRITORY
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960

8 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888

9 CALL OF DUTY
cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960

10 JOINT OPERATIONS:
TYPHOON RISING
Listed on NovaWorld



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Need:

A copy of *Oblivion*
No prior knowledge of *Elder Scrolls*
An absence of other things to do

What you'll get:

- ✓ A character you won't kill on purpose
- ✓ A rat-slayer of repute
- ✓ Someone up to fulfilling a prophecy
- ✗ A ruddy bard

Set up a decent character in... Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

Jon Blyth got stuck with a stupid bard he hates, so you don't have to...

AFTER PLAYING THROUGH the tutorial level, the soldier who'd watched my progress said that he thought I would make an excellent bard. How he came to that conclusion, I can't say. Perhaps it was the exquisitely crafted mandolin I hadn't been playing at all throughout my escape. I was so startled that I accepted his advice, leaving me with a fairly naff-ish bloke who can use a knife and make the odd potion. So if you're taking your first daunting steps into *Oblivion*, here's some helpful stuff about setting your character up...



01 CHARACTER CLASSES

You're better off not accepting the guard's recommendation of class. To start, look through the pre-set classes that don't make you cringe – what could be more embarrassing than a bard? Don't be afraid to make your own skill-sets based on the ones that you want to have. Bear in mind that some skills – hand-to-hand, mercantile and acrobatics in particular – are a bit rubbish. Remember too that if you're improving your major skills all the time, the enemies you face will get harder when you level up. Also, save here so you can make a new character with ease.



02 Hello Mr Biglungs

Argonians, apart from looking a bit like Jar Jar Binks' slapped arse, have gills behind their ears, which lets them breathe underwater without putting their hands to their neck, pointing at their mouths and dying. This has a few benefits – you won't need high athletics or potions to hunt for underwater chests containing scraps of gold, jewels and lockpick-style tat. You can also go clam-hunting for pearls, which'll fetch you a few hundred gold each, depending on your mercantile skill. Argonians don't have much else going for them, though – their skill bonuses are pretty weak – and more importantly, they're ugly.

03 ARMY OF LOVERS

As you leave the tutorial dungeon, you'll be asked for your star sign. Of the 13, there are some obviously appropriate choices (Warrior, Mage and Thief, for example, couldn't spell it out any stupider). But the other signs are worth looking at, too. Being born under the Shadow lets you go invisible for a minute a day – which, coupled with the topless mod (see page 117) gives you all the hallmarks of a classic frat movie shower scene. Lovers are cool, too – they can paralyse their enemies with a kiss. "Darling, I can't move," your combatant will complain as you come at them with a claymore. "That's 'cos I'm a brilliant lover," you'll reply.

04 Girls vs Boys

1960s feminists will be outraged to hear that *Oblivion* panders to outdated orc stereotypes: female orcs supposedly have less 'personality' than males. Each race's genders have different stat bonuses and penalties. We haven't got room for a table here, but just bear in mind that if you've got your heart set on a warrior, make sure you don't pick a race and gender which fights like a, well, a big soppy girl who does ballet and kisses a poster of Preston before going to bed and dreaming of candy canes.

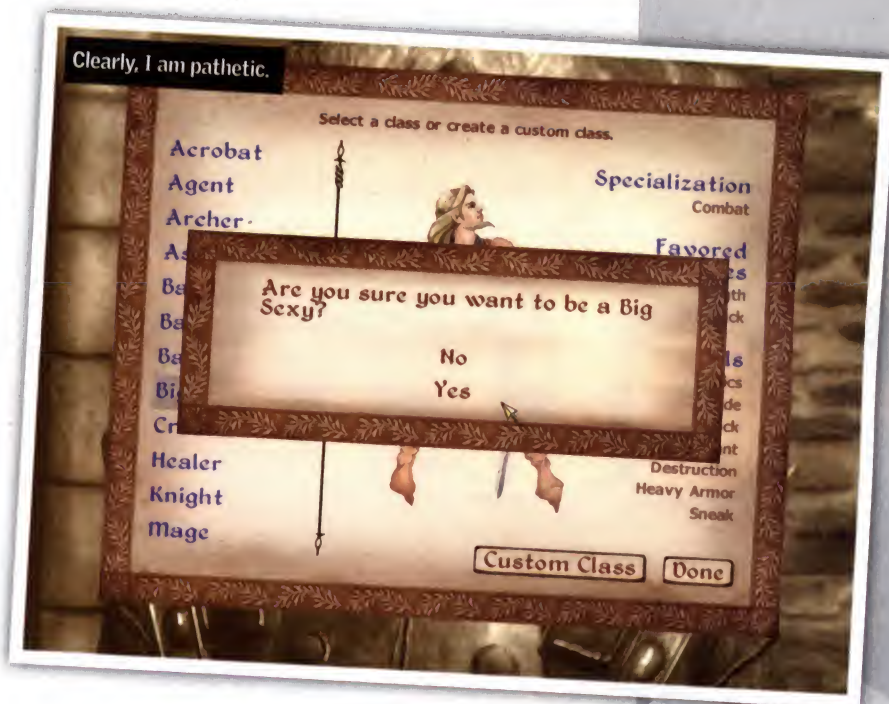
05 THE SPECIALIST

You probably want to be the sneakiest most stealthiest thief that ever there was, gliding around with your finger over your lips and a ton of silverware under your blouse. But bear in mind that the game will be easier – and you'll be more open to play all the aspects of the game – if you don't totally neglect combat and spellcasting. Always try to include a major combat skill. Remember, hostile NPCs level up with you, so if you choose all major skills based on sneaking around, expect to get spread onto the walls if you ever do decide to take on a Skeleton Hero with the fisticuffs.



07 THEY'VE ALL GOT IT ALCHEMY

At the risk of sounding like the home economics teacher who goes on about how important rubbish stuff is, making potions isn't just about running around the countryside, swinging your fingers in the air and singing 'la-di-fa' to a mandrake root. As you improve, more ingredient effects open up, your potions become more powerful and even if you don't use all the crap you've churned out with experimentation, you can still sell them for a fair whack to buy that lovely new tunic you've had your eye on.



06 Vampire and Higher

If you're planning on becoming a vampire – and let's face it, who isn't? – then some of the benefits would suit a fighter (your strength and speed increase the longer you go without a neckslurp), or thievery (at your most vampiric, you get the ability to go invisible with night vision for three minutes). There's a downside – you're weak to fire, and non-vampires don't like selling massive swords to satanic monsters of myth. But even with your appearance, you'll be able to seduce people into ignoring the fact you look like the honking one from Shakespeare's Sister.



08 GUILDING THE LILY

Having a well-rounded character helps you rise through the Guilds. The Fighters and Mages Guild are freely accessible in the bigger towns (except the Imperial City), and heading the Fighters Guild gets you a monthly income. The Mages' quests eventually get you your own altars to make spells, enchant items and replicate alchemy ingredients. To join the Thieves, spend time in prison for theft. For the Dark Brotherhood, kill an innocent. Before you know it (ie, a very long time), you'll be wearing enchanted cowls and collecting money from kills worldwide. **PCZ**



Retro ZONE

All the best in emulation, abandonware and shameless gaming nostalgia...



NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



BUT HOW?

Take the frustration out of emulation

An emulator is basically a program which tricks your PC into thinking it's a NES, an Amiga, a slot machine and so on. The emulators are legal, but it's not always legal to own certain game files (known as roms). As such, we won't be linking you to any dodgy ROM sites, but below is a list of our favourite NES emulators. Due to the fact the NES is 20 years old, most recent PCs should be powerful enough to run them.

Links...

1 FCE Ultra

fceultra.sourceforge.net

The most widely used and successful of the NES emulators.

2 NESTicle

bloodlust.zophar.net/NESticle/nest.html

A portmanteau of NES and testicle and a damn fine emulator too.

WHAT BETTER WAY to celebrate the maiden voyage of our newly designed Retro Zone pages than with a look back at one of the most important pieces of machinery in console history, the Nintendo Entertainment System.

The most popular console of its time, the NES was host to some of the best and most renowned games ever created – *Super Mario Bros* for example, and *Metroid*, *Mega Man*, *Excitebike* and *Duck Hunt* for some more. An amazing menagerie of industry icons were spawned from just a single console and in many cases just a single developer. Also, we've fond memories of blowing dust out of cartridges to make them load. There probably wasn't even any dust in there, but half the fun was just *imagining*.

Cheat codes too – back then, cheat codes were far better. Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, (Start), for example gave you 30 lives in *Contra* – none of these console menus and hacks. In those days, men were men and cheats were cheats.

Of course, Nintendo have gone on to create equally great consoles with the SNES, N64 and Gamecube, and for the past few decades have ruled the handheld market with the Gameboy and DS. It's easy to forget how fantastic it feels to go back 20 years and see where it all started, and it's especially interesting to see which games remain every bit as good as their modern-day counterparts. So why not indulge yourself and check out our recommendations below...

It's easy to forget how fantastic it feels to go back 20 years and see where it all kicked off...

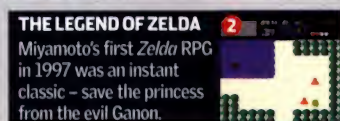
SIX OF THE BEST The half-dozen NES games you have to play



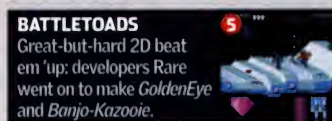
1 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
A superb 2D platformer, *Super Mario Bros. 3* shifted over 17 million copies on its launch in 1989.



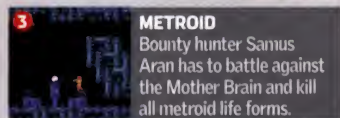
4 CASTLEVANIA
Konami's vampire-battling series starring hero Simon Belmont is a cracking, atmospheric platformer.



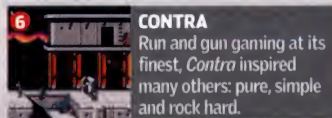
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
Miyamoto's first *Zelda* RPG in 1997 was an instant classic – save the princess from the evil Ganon.



BATTLETOADS
Great-but-hard 2D beat em'up: developers Rare went on to make *GoldenEye* and *Banjo-Kazooie*.



3 METROID
Bounty hunter Samus Aran has to battle against the Mother Brain and kill all metroid life forms.



6 CONTRA
Run and gun gaming at its finest, *Contra* inspired many others: pure, simple and rock hard.



NOW & THEN

Dune II – real-time strategy has a spicy midwife

NOW



C&C3, 2006

THEN



DUNE II, 1992

FOR NON-FANS, *Dune* occupies a blurred, indistinct area in the memory. Spices seem important. Plus, you know there was a pop star in it, but the modern brain won't accept that Sting was ever cool and substitutes a sphere-twiddling Bowie. And were there slugs that you put in the ear? No, that was *The Wrath Of Khan*. Or was it both? Before you know it, you've got a Skexis running around and Ted Danson serving drinks.

One thing that's beyond doubt, is that Westwood's *Dune II* kickstarted the first generation of RTS games on the PC. Two years later – it was a fairly slow kickstart – Blizzard's *Warcraft* took the baby genre into fantasy realms, and in 1995 Westwood's *Command & Conquer* caused global gurgling with the Brotherhood of Nod. You may not be able to zoom in with your trendy new 'mouse wheel', and the pixels are so big that Moses would have refused to carry them down Mount Sinai. But this is where it all began.



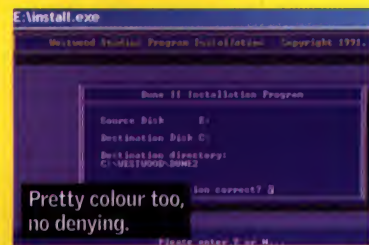
Spice up your wife.

PLAY IT!

PCZONE
ON THE DVD

For your personal sense of intellectual affront – an excruciatingly straightforward guide to watching the *Dune II* demo stretched out into five toe-curlingly simple points...

- 1 Insert Side 1 of the DVD into your DVD drive. This is the second most difficult part.
- 2 Choose *Dune 2* from the Demos section. Now, forget your mouse – they're useless in the kooky world of DOS.
- 3 Tap down twice, type in your preferred install directory and wistfully recall 8.3 file names.
- 4 Find where you put it, and run *Dune2.exe*. If you lose it, install it again. It's only like 16k or something.
- 5 Of course, you could download a fully working abandonware version of questionable legality simply by Googling '*Dune II*', but we wouldn't condone such law-breaking activity.



Pretty colour too, no denying.

MAME FRAME

Who knows what horrors await when *Gals Panic*

DEVELOPER Kaneko YEAR 1990

HIROSHI KANEKO IS a genius. Here, he reaches into the inner turmoil that corrodes the soul of every young boy. Sure, there's the need to hear the words, "I love you", and the thrill of that whispered plea... "Be gentle with me..." as your bodies prepare for that final intimacy. But you cannot deny, there's a fundamental, obsessive need to outfit a pregnant spider in a Qix clone.

While you're coaxing your beautiful lady out of the silhouettes by drawing

shapes over her cardigan, be careful – get too keen and unveil too much of her body before you've worked on the background (this is *Gals Panic* foreplay), and she'll turn into a hideous frog and a crowd of girls will giggle at you. The whole game so accurately echoes our early teenage years, it's not even funny.

Since *Gals Panic 3* was released in 2002, Kaneko has filed for bankruptcy. There may never be a *Gals Panic 4*.



GALS PANIC



She actually said she loved me.

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is an emulator for over 6,000 arcade games, and is perfectly legal. However, on its own it's useless, and requires ROMs to play all the old coin-ops. These ROMs are copyrighted, so it's illegal to own them unless you own the arcade machine. We're not nagging, we're just letting you know.



Where are you?



Your place or mine?

BACK IN THE DAY...



1. LucasArts logo

By Will Porter

There was a time when a logo meant something. When you'd sing its jingle from its high pitch beginning (Lucas) to its bass end (ARTS...) and feel proud – safe in the knowledge that you were in the presence of gaming goodness. Or at least *Star Wars* – which was, in those days, still a safe bet. Even better were the days when you'd see a Lucasfilm tag and jolly music, and Guybrush – lovely Guybrush. Or perhaps Governor Marley. Or Stan, remember him? He used to wave his arms around! We used to laugh so much. We were so happy, you and I. Hold me in your arms and dance with me the way we used to. My eyes are fading, but I still feel young. I'm still happy.

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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill rolls the many-sided dice as he jumps lute first into *Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach*

AS A WAY OF filling the aching void between the end of *Countdown* and the start of *The Simpsons*, there are worse things to do than play *Du****s & Dr****s Online*. Watch *Deal Or No Deal*, for instance. There are also considerably better things to do, such as having a threesome. By way of compromise, we're having a threesome in *Stormreach*, we being the unlikely triumvirate of my good self, new boy Hogarty and the inestimable Suzy Wallace. Or to use our goblin names, Therealsteve Hill, Johnny Magnificent and Uzibat Moozibat.

If you're a regular reader, you'll recall I'm currently working my passage through *Stormreach* as a bard, able to mesmerise the most fearsome of beasts with my magical lute. Or I would if I was actually allowed to play it. As I announce to no-one in particular while waiting in the pub: "I need to get to level 3 to unleash the power of music." With my trusty companions at my side, this should be a cinch, and we set off in search of merry adventures and small beasts to slay. First though, there are issues to address with my staff (as in personnel, not rod).

Addressing young Hogarty, I justifiably ask: "What the f*** have you come as?" "I'm a human, I think," blurts Johnny

Magnificent (for it is he). Human he might be, but his hair appears to be made out of bread. Sashaying into The Wavecrest Tavern with a casual "afternoon", Suzy the Sorceress is scarcely any more presentable, rocking the dowdy indie chick look with only moderate success. To put it politely, she could do with a bath.

WHY SO BLUE?

Hypocritically, I greet her with a friendly, "Looking good, Uzi." In return she compliments me on my "nice blue hair", tempered with the slightly cautious caveat: "Hope it washes out."

Announcing that, "I've got a job down the sewers," the hapless pair dutifully follow as we set out to seek the alchemist's healing elixir. Again. Repeating the same quest that Hogarty and me failed to complete last month, we still manage to get hopelessly lost, at one point reappearing on the street. Stumbling blindly round a sewer, we're literally in the shit.

"Nice orienteering," points out the insolent Magnificent, proving himself anything but. Finally getting our bearings, Suzy follows me down a ladder with the warning "don't look up the skirt," uncannily mirroring my exact thoughts.

As indeed is Hogarty when he suggests: "This time Suzy can do the

riddle." At which point we both stand back and take childish glee as Uzibat pulls the wrong lever and is savaged to death by scorpions.

MACE IN THE FACE

Finally completing the quest, we recuperate in the pub before heading out for another job, which involves either finding some scrolls or some daggers. Offering the choice to my team, Hogarty opts for scrolls with the logic that "they're lighter". It's a fair point, and we set off in search of a warehouse, despite the fact that it's pissing down.

Suzy finally finds the warehouse – we were stood next to it – and we steam in, to be informed by the narrator that, "a damp unhealthy smell pervades the air". Slaughtering a couple of guards, we charge around aimlessly until we inadvertently open a secret passage. Tentatively edging in, the narrator gravely informs us that "jelly drips and dribbles everywhere in this disgusting alcove". "Very much like my home life," I muse.

Knee-deep in slime, this isn't really what my co-adventurers signed up for, and morale is at a low. Johnny Magnificent Hogarty is making his own entertainment though, barking, "eat my mace you shits" as he smites another foe.


Seemingly at a dead end, Magnificent speculatively asks: "Does somebody have the silver key? The door is over there."

It turns out I've had the key all along, and I open the door to reveal some kind of tile-based puzzle. "What's this, *The Crystal Maze*?" I scoff, but Suzy has already taken the initiative and is rotating tiles like a natural, not helped by Hogarty yelling: "Turn that one around!"

GIRL POWER

Uzibat impressively completes the task with five seconds left, frantically grabbing the crystal (scrolls) and running out of the door to be congratulated by accountants in jumpsuits (a bard and a beard).

Buoyed by our success, we head into a crypt to smack skeletons about with blunt instruments. I get separated from the group, but hear Magnificent tell Uzibat: "I think Steve's off breaking sarcophagusses." "Sarcophagi," I remotely correct him.

After posing for a quick group photo, we re-emerge above ground to the breaking news that the heroic Johnny Magnificent has logged off because, "Will needs his computer back". Uzibat Moozibat soon follows, and I'm left friendless and alone. And I never did get to play my lute... 

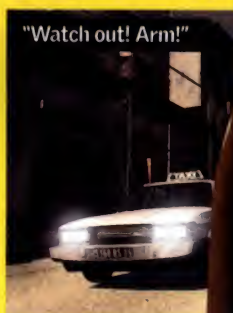


There are worse things to do than play *D&D: Online* – watch *Deal Or No Deal*, for instance

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IN THE BOX

Act Of War

Driv3r

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3



THEY PROBABLY DIDN'T see it coming. Gradually, the Atari-branded jet skis began to disappear from between their pale, game-publishing legs. Month by month, their transport options went from private jets to business class, then from economy class to a dodgy Cessna piloted by some geezer from Poland. The wind machine they'd bought to blow a flurry of bank notes around their offices got weaker and weaker, until all that was blowing around was a solitary memo: "Release another compilation. Switch to Tesco Value wine. Everything is OK."

Cue a high-intensity focus group with a cigar-chewing fat man and the sock puppets on his hands, the findings of which indicate that the best possible

strategy when compiling a compilation is to combine three games which have absolutely nothing to do with one another, save being published by Atari. Spread the net wide, as it were. "And how about," pipes up the left hand as the man's mouth twitches oddly, "we release *Act Of War* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*, two decent games, with *Driv3r*, a streak of steaming, viscous donkey excrement?"

LOOK! OVER THERE!

Of course! The old misdirection technique – what better way to get rid of a warehouse full of unsold copies of the PC version *Drive-three-er* than to sandwich each one between a pair of Atari's far more accomplished releases. The term 'shit sandwich' gets bandied about so much these days that the true





"Right, now gently release the clutch..."



The *Driver* series has lost its charm.



No amount of glamorous angles can save you.

meaning has been sullied and somewhat lost: a shit sandwich is a bad thing in between two great things. Sure, you might think you'd rather have no sandwich at all instead of a shit sandwich, but in logical terms, the shit sandwich can be just as enticing as two plain slices of nice, white bread.

What our inane bread analogies are trying to say is that despite the random and arbitrary grouping of its three titles, *Atari Deluxe Collection* isn't necessarily a bad thing. *Act Of War* (issue 153, 84%) may have had its RTS head pushed beneath the water by some of the more recently released strategy titles, but nevertheless it's an enjoyable RTS with some nice innovations, decent production values and a strong story.

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 (issue 149, 79%) is the pinnacle of the series, placing you in charge of a theme park, allowing you to construct your own rollercoasters,

and best of all giving you the chance to ride it in full 3D-o-vision. Original problems with the interface have been ironed out with subsequent patches, as well as new ones introduced, but the game remains the best theme park sim around, especially when coupled with the expansion packs (not included, obviously).

THE FILLING

Then we come to the abysmal *Driv3r* (issue 155, 59%), a horrible console game which took the fantastic *Driver* series (well, the first one was excellent), blatantly robbed it of its self-respect and then tried to unashamedly rip off *GTA* at every turn. The PC version was apparently ported by monkeys, and the implementation of mouse-control was apparently carried out by pirates with hooks where their hands should be.

Some enjoyment might be garnered from *Driv3r's* driving sections, but it's

largely an uninspired waste of time, time which might be better spent fornicating with a set of knives. All that, and they've spelt it *Driv3r*, which is just so inherently infuriating that to lay your eyes upon it is to shorten your life expectancy by five or so days due to stress.

And there you have the shit sandwich. How does the sandwich fare economically then? If you tot up the RRP's, these games approach a total in the region of £80. In realistic terms, meaning if you shop online, you could easily pick up all three games for well under £40. Furthermore, if you don't want *Driv3r* (and you probably don't), you could forego the *Atari Deluxe Collection* altogether and get *Act Of War*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* and the *Soaked!* expansion for around £35. You've got quite a few options.

For a compilation like this to stand a chance of success, it needs to fulfil two clear and fairly obvious criteria. It

Marketing strategy

Or you could buy...

This is a bit more like it – alongside the *Atari Deluxe Collection*, Atari will also be releasing *Atari Strategy Deluxe*, a compilation of three of Atari's greatest RTS games. For fear of repeating the word Atari in this box again, here are the contents: *Total Annihilation* (issue 56, 92%), *Total Annihilation: Kingdoms* (issue 78, 94%), *Axis & Allies* (issue 71, 80%) and *Act Of War* (again, issue 153, 84%). Not only does this compilation contain consistently great games, it's also got a bit of a strategy theme running through it. Good job Atari!



The abysmal *Driv3r* is largely an uninspired waste of time, time which might be better spent fornicating with a set of knives



must contain games you want to play, and it must be cheaper than buying those games separately. *Atari Deluxe Collection* contains two games you'll want to play, but works out at roughly the same price. It's hardly deluxe, and forgive us for assuming that absolutely nobody is interested in the *Driv3r* facet of the triptych, but it doesn't really offer any savings either. You're better off buying the games separately – get some sticky tape while you're there and make your own deluxe collection. **PCZ**



THE RAVAGES OF TIME

ASTEROIDS	1st
PAPERBOY	2nd
CENTIPEDE	3rd

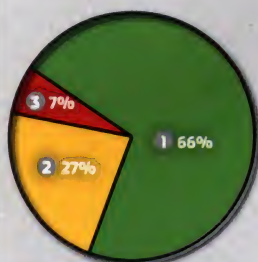
We're still counting on an Atari return to form – until then we'll keep playing the *Atari Collections* Midway keeps releasing. It hasn't been that long since they reigned supreme has it?

SUPERTEST THE FUNNIEST GAME! LOL!

The **ZONE** team slowly swivel their massive eyes to scrutinise in-game laughter...

YOUR VIEW

Last month's subject: what RPG is the one you love the most?



DEUS EX 1st
OBLIVION 2nd
KOTOR 3rd

TheTingler: "Deus Ex let me choose stealth or shooting in the way that Thief failed to, and successfully married System Shock with people. It's my No.1 game of all time."

Petepointon: "Neverwinter Nights was BioWare trying to get to grips with a 3D engine and producing a very routine game, but KOTOR showed them beginning to come to terms with the possibilities of the technology."

DaDuke: "Deus Ex – the best PC game ever. OK, it's more of a hybrid RPG and FPS and there's no dice throwing, but it provides a more immersive experience than any other RPG I've played because of it. It's this immersion that makes a great RPG."

Cobalt Nova: "Oblivion is a great leap forward, clearly the best RPG – and PC game – so far. It raises the bar for all games: its scope is so far in advance of stuff like HL2 that it beggars belief."

NO-ONE CAN argue that 'being funny' is essential to a good game. Funny is also a difficult thing to get right, and even if you do get it right, there's always loads of idiots who wipe their mice across their foreheads and go "dow, I don't ged id". So when someone does make a funny game, it can stop you dead in your tracks, and it's that sense of 'they didn't have to' that makes you love them all the more for bothering.

This month's Supertest gave us all a chance to talk about the games that have charmed us, like a laundry basket full of snickering cobras, with their barefaced wit.

These conversations usually spiral into nostalgic laments about Sam & Max (soon coming back), and how Monkey Island just wasn't as funny when

Guybrush was given a voice. Once all that was out of the way, Psychonauts was positively lavished with praise. It's a game where the childlike (but hugely intelligent) humour wasn't an easy set of wise-cracks in a script, but extended to every character, the creative design and fundamentally underpinned every part of the game. Steve, Will and Andy all voted for Tim Schafer's new and criminally under-purchased game, so even with Log's vote for the self-made physics-related larks of Garry's Mod for Half-Life 2, and Jamie siding with the classic The Secret Of Monkey Island, Psychonauts came out a clear winner.

You can have your say on our fragrant and adorable website (www.pczone.co.uk). Just click on Forums, and follow the trail of words where you'll find a sticky poll.



Sefton protests that laughter costs him money.



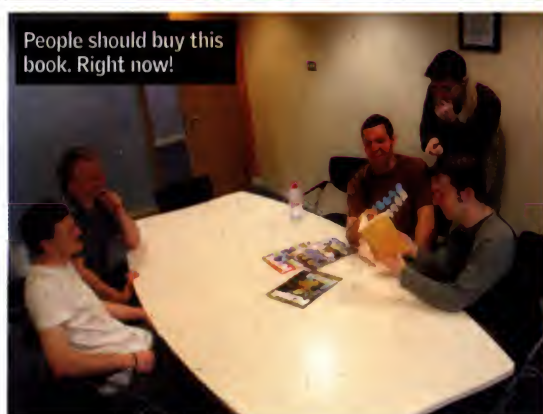
Will's zest for life exposed.



"Apparently, we're quite good..."



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DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS

We gather round with Lionhead to hear the whimsical tale behind their magical RPG

IT'S ALWAYS A pleasure to chat with Lionhead, so this month we were delighted to get together with Guildford's finest development house to hear the tall tale behind *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, one of the studio's most hilarious and bumpkin creations. We put on our robes and wizard hats to take council with brothers Dene Carter (designer, left) and Simon Carter (lead coder, right), the minds behind all the brothels, phallic hedges and chicken football of Albion...



02 CRAZY IDEAS: Dene: "There were frankly buckets of really stupid ideas we had throughout the development of *Fable*; things like chicken-kicking competitions and brothels. The nice thing with *Fable* is it's the sort of game where, when you have an idea or when you think about something in the normal, everyday world that strikes you as a bit ridiculous, you can think, 'I wonder what that would be like in Albion?' So anything from, 'What would a games magazine be like in Albion?', to, 'What would it be like to go on a historical tour in Albion?' That's why you have all these very bizarre, almost recognisable characters – Jack Sparrow in our original arena, for example."

01 HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: Dene: "When Simon and I were kids, we were kicking around the idea of something we called 'The Game'. This was going to be an RPG where you could do pretty much anything you wanted in the entire world, including taming your own horses and mixing your own potions from everything. In short, it was just ridiculous." Simon: "And very, very dull!" Dene: "Imagine *Morrowind*, but multiply the dullness by an ultra-large factor. It wasn't on any specific platform, the idea was just 'The Game' in our heads and it kept moving onto whatever platform we were on next. 'Wow, 256k of memory! That'll be perfect!'"

"I think if you were to ask our artists, the bit they were most pleased they got away with were the topiary cocks"

Simon Carter, lead coder, *Fable: TLC*





A headband and a 'tache. We like his style.

03 THE WEST COUNTRY: Dene: (In a stern voice) "We'd like to feel that *Fable* has a very deep, philosophical message. It's actually ripping the piss out of the culture of celebrity greatly. We really liked the idea that these heroes were frankly, stupidly blown-up, horrible characters you'd find in *Hello!*, and all the people would pander and cater to them, and clap their stupid hands with glee every time they did anything: 'Oh look, it's a hero wiping his nose!' This is really ripe to rip the piss out of." Simon: "We were watching a lot of *Big Brother*."

Dene: "We were trying to differentiate the accents so that the country yokels were very obviously overt country yokels. So we took the most strong, unpleasantly horrible regional country accents we could and blew them out of all proportion, so you really knew who you were supposed to care about and who was a clapping monkey. They were all caricatures intentionally though, so if ever I visit Northumberland, for example, I hope there's not a gang of pissed off people gathered outside my hotel..."



Fable went for humour, and by and large, it worked.

04 ALAN PARTRIDGE: Simon: "We had quite a few comedians who did many of the voices in *Fable*. One of the guys from *I'm Alan Partridge* – Simon Greenall – did a lot of the voices, and his timing and vocal range were extremely impressive. He was very, very funny."

Dene: "Yes, Simon Greenall was an absolute scream, absolutely fantastic – he's the unintelligible geordie chap from *I'm Alan Partridge* who talks about throwing monkeys into the sea. When he was recording he just spontaneously did most of the voices in the game in all these different accents, then all we had to do was focus on the ones we thought were the funniest."

We failed – but can you find the *Fable* phallic shrubbery? Email a screenshot of them and we'll send you a prize.



05 PHALLIC BUSHES: Simon: "I think if you were to ask our artists, the bit they were most pleased they got away with was the topiary cocks."

Dene: "If you were to hang around the guild in the northern part of Bowerstone, you'd have all these bushes which are very strangely phallically shaped, and we only realised this fairly close to the end. Basically, it was late and they were a bit pissed off that they were working late, so they decided to make things shaped out of penises."

Simon: "Yeah, I think they're actually in the north part of Bowerstone. But if you asked them on another day, they'd just say that it was in fact a complete accident and there's nothing even remotely phallic about the shape of those bushes."





Boy George's disguise was fooling no-one.

06 MAN LOVE: Dene: "We were trying to be extremely politically correct with *Fable*, in that we were very proud of being one of the first games where you could have a gay relationship. By default, the code was obviously politically correct in that you could get married to anybody and have sex in the game. So we then went down the route of thinking that if you're a man and there are sex scenes where you can have sex with your wife, then there should be sex scenes where you can have sex with your husband as well."

"However, when we recorded the sex scene between two men it was embarrassing and truly awful – everybody was shocked and appalled by this really badly judged, *Carry On*-style gay sex scene; it was just insulting. So we dropped it without a second thought."



Love truly is a many splendoured thing.

07 THE BROTHEL: Simon: "Originally, we thought we'd only put about three or four days into it and then Adam – one of our brilliant artists – came back and had completely made over the brothel. The fabric that's in there at the moment is this obvious porn-palace kind of look – in fact, we originally had a flashing sign that had 'GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!' outside. Then, when it came to scripters, they put a similar level of love and respect into it. We originally had them as generic *GTA*-style brothel women; characterless, with standard lines for all of their interactions. Then we ended up with a 75-page script, and I thought 'My god, you've given these characters more background than any of the heroes!'"

Dene: "I think the original idea for the brothel was from Peter (Molyneux). At the end of *Dungeon Keeper*, Peter also came up with the idea of having a brothel in one of the expansion packs, and then I think at the end of *Black & White* he had this remarkable idea of having a brothel in *Black & White*. So I think that at the end of a game, Peter thinks, 'I know what will make this better – a brothel!'"



"Honestly officer, I was just teaching her the Heimlich manoeuvre..."



He'll catch a cold without a scarf.

08 THE PRISON: Dene: "We had many problems with the prison. We started off with the whole prison outbreak thing, referencing things like *The Count Of Monte Cristo* and various other bits. It was supposed to be a very dark, very serious and very moving part of the game, but we realised that we'd created such a strange, silly bird of a game that it didn't quite work. Every single time we tried to get very leaden and moving like: (gravelly voice) 'I've been here now for... Ten whole years,' we just started giggling because it's just a very silly game. The whole Vagon poetry recital came up during one very late coffee-fuelled session, where we were desperately trying to think 'if we can't do it seriously, how can we make this absolutely ridiculous?' It was more in a sense of ridicule and the desire to try and undo the situation we'd got ourselves into at that point."

09 THE CHICKEN HAT: Dene: "It may be completely stupid, but I love the idea that you can completely undermine the heroic experience when you play *Fable*."

Simon: "The idea for the chicken hat came from *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. In that game you could have the rabbit ears, and in the time-travelling cut-scene it was just fantastically funny. So we talked about being able to play the entirety of *Fable* while wearing a chicken hat; having all these emotive cut-scenes while you've got a big chicken hat on would be quite funny."

Dene: "Nooooooo! Mother! Cluck, cluck!"

Simon: "People have said that it's almost like *Fable* was written by Gonzo from *The Muppets*, because it has this strange obsession with wild foul." **PC7**



"Chicken? Who are you calling chicken?"



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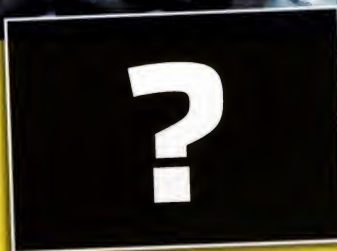
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DOMINIK DIAMOND

This month, I travel to the promised land to get hammered...

"Why are there no decent games about Jesus? It'd make a cracking *Max Payne*-style affair"



AS DOMINIK TRAVELS the globe in the search of lapsed spirituality, he turns his eyes up to the heavens – and there, bathed in shining light, he sees Sir Patrick Moore. "Gamesmaster!" Dominik begins...

This column is going to seem a bit surreal, so bear with me. But there I was in Jerusalem for the weekend retracing the final steps of Jesus Christ (see what I mean)? It's part of a film I'm making for Channel 5, in which I travel the world to try to rediscover my lapsed religious faith. I know. I think it's a bit bizarre too. I mean, when I started out I was making knob gags with a leather-clad Zoe Ball while she played *Motocross GP*. But, hey! Even Linda Lovelace couldn't do the same job forever.

"Fair enough Dominik!" I hear you cry. "We accept that your media career may not have completely dried up in 1997 after all – but what's this got to do with the price of *Quake 4*?"

Well... I was walking up the Via Dolorosa where Christ was forced to carry his cross and paused at the point where

he fell down for the second time. It's just about the most deeply spiritual place in the Christian world, and right there on the side of the pavement was an Internet café. With a kid in there wantonly blasting the shit out of someone in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

CRUCIFIED

Two things leapt to mind. First, how dare they have some juvie playing the most violent videogame ever in such a sacred place? And second: even in the ancient city of Jerusalem, I can't get away from f***ing videogames. As I finally get the chance to prove that televisually I can be the perfect mix of Michael Palin, Aled Jones and Bill Hicks, it's like god was telling me: it doesn't matter what you do mate – you'll *still* have people thinking it's hilarious to ask you for tips on *Zelda*.

But then I thought: why is there such a contradiction between *Grand Theft Auto* and Christ's last steps? This was a horrifically violent episode. Have you seen Mel Gibson's *The Passion Of The Christ*? It makes *Grand Theft Auto* look like *Bubble Bobble*.

I also thought – why are there no decent videogames about Jesus? It's just about the only genre left unexploited. It would make a cracking third-person *Max Payne*-style affair.

Time slows down while you try to smash all the moneylending tables in the temple before the Pharisees show up. Walking on water? I'm sure I've seen that in *Tomb Raider*. And surely feeding the five thousand with a few loafs and a couple of fish is the kind of task to whet the appetite of any micro-management fan?

Best of all, how about an MMO called *City Of Messiahs*? You start as a level one Messiah with basic water-into-wine ability, by level eight you can raise people from the dead and by level 100 you can quite literally take away the sins of the world.

Think that's ridiculous? I sit writing this in Dubai airport waiting for a connecting flight to the Philippines, where every year in a place called San Fernando people get crucified for real. With nails. I've been invited to become the first Westerner to take part. By contrast *Grand Theft Donkey: Gethsemane* seems perfectly sound. **PCZ**



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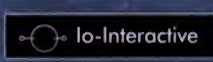
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